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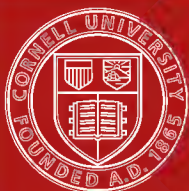
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The big idea;an unusual play, in three a



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# THE BIG IDEA

*An Unusual Play, in Three Acts*

BY

A. E. Thomas and Clayton Hamilton

*Authors of "The Better Understanding,"  
"Thirty Days," Etc.*

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28-30 West 38th Street

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SAMUEL FRENCH, LTD.  
26 Southampton Street  
STRAND

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The following is a copy of the playbill of the first performance of "The Big Idea," at the Hudson Theatre, New York City, Nov. 16, 1914.

COHAN & HARRIS PRESENT

# THE BIG IDEA

## A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY

A. E. THOMAS & CLAYTON HAMILTON

Staged Under the Direction of Sam Forrest

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### THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

	AGE	ORIGINAL CAST
RICHARD HOWARD.....	23....	Ernest Glendinning
JAMES HOWARD.....	55....	Forrest Robinson
ROBERT CASWELL.....	22....	Richard Sterling
MR. BYRNE.....	50....	Harrold Russell
CHARLES GILMORE.....	37....	William Courtleigh
STEVEN BINGHAM.....	40....	George Wright, Jr.
JIM.....		Harold Grau
ELAINE FOSTER.....	21....	Desmond Kelley
MRS. HOWARD.....	50....	Isabel Garrison
ELSIE HOWARD.....	18....	Hazel Lowry
MARY.....		Frances Wright

---

TIME: THE PRESENT

### SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

- Act I. Richard Howard's Den, in a fine house in a suburb of New York.
- Act II. Same scene, 10 o'clock the next morning.
- Act III. Charles Gilmore's Office in Times Square, New York.

# TO BE SPOKEN BEFORE THE CURTAIN

BY THE ACTOR PLAYING CHARLES GILMORE

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Ladies and gentlemen :—I beg to announce that the play you are about to witness is unusual in this respect: it is quite true. By that I mean that its story has been taken not from the fancy of its authors but from life itself. A few persons, a very few, will instantly recognize the characters and incidents of this narrative, but there is no danger that they will ever be publicly identified, inasmuch as all these persons have the best of reasons for holding their tongues. And so, ladies and gentlemen, should you in the course of the play chance upon an episode that seems strange or curious to you, be so kind as to place the responsibility not upon the authors, but upon that strange and curious thing called Life.

# THE BIG IDEA

## ACT I

SCENE:—*The room is a spacious study on the top floor of the suburban house of the HOWARD family. The ceiling is rather low. The main entrance to the room is at R. U. E. Up C. are sliding double doors hung with heavy curtains. When these doors are open, they disclose an alcove room, with a baby grand piano, a piano lamp, and a chandelier. At L. is a large bay window, with curtains before it. In the first act, the star-lit sky beyond this window indicates the hour of 8:30 or 9 P. M. Down L., below the bay window, is a door leading into an adjacent private room. There is a big, flat-topped writing-desk down C., with a comfortable chair above it. This desk is furnished with all the litter likely to be accumulated by a man who works at putting words together. Over it, hanging very low, is an electrolier containing five very powerful bulbs, shaded by a dark green bowl, so as to throw a very high, strong light upon the desk and such persons and furniture as may immediately surround it. At R. is a fireplace; before it a divan; and, next to the divan, a small table carrying an electric lamp, with exposed wiring; adjacent to this table is a chair. Up C., to R. of the sliding doors, is another small table, carrying a vase with flowers. Down L. is a third small table, with two chairs. There is another chair before the window. The room is lined with bookcases. The furniture is such as would naturally be chosen for his work-room by a young man of taste, means, and culture. On*

*the wall, in a not too conspicuous position, is a Harvard banner. One sees also some good photographic reproductions of standard works of art and architecture, a bag of golf-clubs, several pipes and tobacco-jars, and a bust of Dante.*

*Curtain rises on absolutely dark stage. JAMES HOWARD is sitting at the desk. His son RICHARD is standing near him. Both are invisible in the blackness attending the rise of the Curtain.*

MR. HOWARD. Oh, my God!

DICK. Come, come, don't tremble so. Lean on me. There, that's better.

MR. HOWARD. Dick, Dick, what's the use of it all?

DICK. Come, sit down. There, there, you'll feel better. You must rest.

MR. HOWARD. Rest, rest, I'll never rest again.

DICK. Poor dad, you poor old dad!

MR. HOWARD. Oh, my God!

DICK. Do you mind if we have a little light? This blackness is getting on my nerves. (*turns up light: the two tragic figures are shown in the bright light cast downward by the central electrolier*)

Come, come, Dad, this won't do. I'm trying to help you, don't you see? That's why I got you out of bed and brought you here to my study where we were sure to be left alone. I just felt I couldn't stand it any longer. I had to know what it was.

MR. HOWARD. Yes, yes, Dick, I know.

DICK. But if I'm going to be of any help to you, you must try and pull yourself together, don't you see? You must, you must. We've got to do something between us, and pretty quickly, too.

MR. HOWARD. There's nothing to do, Dick.

DICK. I don't believe it. I can't believe it.

MR. HOWARD. I've tried everything I know, everything I could possibly think of, exhausted every

resource, borrowed from every friend I know. I managed to raise the greater part of it, but I'm still \$20,000 short. Byrne is suspicious already, and on Friday the Government Bank Examiner is due. It's no use, Dick; it's disgrace; I'm done for and I've done for your mother and your sister and you. Oh, Dick, my boy! (*rises*)

DICK. Dad, Dad, pull yourself together. We're not done yet, we can't be. There must be a way out if we can only find it. Now, tell me: this house, it must be worth thirty thousand dollars.

MR. HOWARD. Mortgaged up to the hilt.

DICK. Well, the Marblehead place.

MR. HOWARD. Mortgaged to the roof, and everything in it. You don't think I've come to this without a struggle.

DICK. But your stock in the bank.

MR. HOWARD. Hypothecated, every share of it. I've sold every share of stock, every bond, every security I have in the world. My God, I've even pawned your mother's jewels under pretense of having them cleaned.

DICK. (*walks up and down r*) Oh, if I'd only gone into business when I left college. If I'd only done something to make money instead of trying to write stories, I might be some use to you now.

MR. HOWARD. It's hard, Dick, it's hard. It isn't as if I meant to do anything wrong; but when Ned Jefferson came to me, somehow I couldn't say no to him. We were old friends. I'd never have been President of the McKinley National if it hadn't been for him. He'd done a lot to give me a start in the world, when we were both young.

DICK. (*sits on sofa*) Yes, Dad, I know, I know.

MR. HOWARD. He had this scheme for floating his trolley syndicate. It sounded all right and seemed all

right on investigation. There were big people in it; and when Ned asked me to endorse his notes I couldn't say no. How could I know that the Ned Jefferson I used to know had turned into a crook!

DICK. Of course you couldn't, Dad, you couldn't. (*rises, crosses to desk*)

MR. HOWARD. And even now I'm not sure of it. The Elliots withdrew their support, and then the trolley scheme burst like a bubble; and no one knows where Ned is.

DICK. And now the Bank Examiner comes in four days and you're \$20,000 short.

MR. HOWARD. I had to make good on Ned's notes, and at once. I was only borrowing the money from the bank; it goes without saying that I meant to put it back.

DICK. Of course you did, Dad, of course. (*crosses back of desk to L.*) Well, I've got an automobile that you gave me; a few decent suits of clothes that you've paid for; about a dozen rejected manuscripts; three hundred dollars in the bank; and (*producing the money*) nine dollars and seventy-six cents; and oh, yes, a life insurance policy that you bought for me. (*takes policy from drawer in desk*) There it is. It would be worth twenty-five thousand dollars to me if I were forty-two years old, or to you if I were dead; but unfortunately I'm neither forty-two nor dead.

MR. HOWARD. Dick—don't!

DICK. Well, Dad, it looks as if we should all go broke together.

MR. HOWARD. (*rises*) Broke!—Prison—that's where I'm going.

DICK. Dad!

MR. HOWARD. (*crosses front of desk to L.*) Yes, I shall die in prison; and your mother will be dis-

graced, and Elsie, too, and you. Dick, it will kill your mother. It's no use— (*sits chair-L.*)

DICK. Oh, now Dad, you mustn't give up, we're not done yet, it's you and I together, now. All your life you've been doing things for me; it's time I did something for you, and I will. I'll find a way, you'll see; just how I don't know yet, but it must come right somehow. It's got to.

(*ELSIE knocks on door and enters*)

DICK. (*goes C.*) Sis, bless you, I'm glad to see you.

ELSIE. Well, I was afraid you weren't. You didn't come down stairs to see me, and I've been away such a long time.

DICK. I'm sorry, Sis, forgive me; but really I was terribly busy, but I've missed you lots. (*down R of desk*)

ELSIE. Honest?

DICK. Honest Injun!

ELSIE. Are you going to Sallie Trumbull's dance with us?

DICK. I'm sorry, Sis, but I can't. Bob will take you.

ELSIE. But I want you to meet my chum, Elaine Foster.

DICK. Elaine Foster!

ELSIE. Why, yes, the girl I wrote you about. She's down stairs now with mother and Bob. Oh, you'll like her; she's as clever as you are. She's the editor of the college paper, "The Miscellany."

DICK. I'm sorry, but I can't see her now. (*goes back of desk*)

ELSIE. Well you ought to. (*crosses to MR. HOWARD*) Are you feeling better, Daddy?

MR. HOWARD. Yes, dear, I'm better.

ELSIE. I hope you're not going to be very ill.

MR. HOWARD. Oh, I'll be all right, dear. Try not to worry.

ELSIE. Dr. Stevens told mother that your nerves are in bad shape and that, as soon as you can, you ought to go away for a rest.

MR. HOWARD. Yes, dear, perhaps I shall.

(*Knock. MRS. HOWARD enters.*)

MRS. HOWARD. I was so disappointed you didn't come down to dinner, dear.

DICK. I'm sorry, Mother. (*he sits*)

ELSIE. He's getting to be an awful grind, Mother. (*goes to DICK*)

MRS. HOWARD (*to MR. HOWARD*) I came up to see how you were feeling, Jim, and when I didn't find you in your room, I was just a little worried. (*crosses L. to MR. HOWARD*)

MR. HOWARD. I'm sorry, Alice.

MRS. HOWARD. You ought to be in bed, you know.

MR. HOWARD. Oh, I'm all right; just wanted a little chat with Dick.

MRS. HOWARD. Don't you think you'd better go back now?

MR. HOWARD. Perhaps I had. (*business*) Perhaps I had. (*rises, crosses with MRS. HOWARD toward door R.*)

MRS. HOWARD. Aren't you coming down, Dick?

DICK. No, Mother, I think not.

(*ELSIE goes off C., lights lamp, plays piano*)

MRS. HOWARD. I wish you would; you know Elsie has brought her friend, Elaine Foster, home with her.

DICK. Yes, yes, Sis was just telling me.

MRS. HOWARD. (C.) But Dick, the girls want to try some new dances, and they need you.

DICK. I'm sorry, Mother, but I've got some work to do.



MR. HOWARD. (U.R.C.) Goodnight, Dick.

DICK. Goodnight, Dad. Do try and get some sleep. (MR. HOWARD *exits*)

MRS. HOWARD. Dick, what is it?

DICK. It's all right. Mother. Goodnight.

MRS. HOWARD. Goodnight, my son. Elsie——

ELSIE. Yes, Mother.

MRS. HOWARD. Come, dear.

(MRS. HOWARD *exits*)

ELSIE. I do wish you'd come down, Dick.

DICK. Please, little sister, I can't. Don't you worry your pretty little head about me. Goodnight. (*kisses her. ELSIE exits*). (*Crosses to chair back of desk, then to window L.—and back to desk. Policy business, gun business, light business. Long piece of business with electrolier. Walks about the room in meditation. Goes to desk, takes pistol from drawer, holds it in right hand, holds life insurance policy in left hand. He is thinking that he might shoot himself and the policy would be paid to his father. He decides that this plan would not be practicable. Throws pistol in drawer—policy on desk—and walks about. Reaches table R., and absent-mindedly turns on the electric table-lamp. The wires of this lamp give him the idea of getting an electric shock that should seem to be an accidental death. Accordingly, he takes his pocket-knife and scrapes away enough of the insulation to give his fingers a contact. He goes to the vase of flowers on the table up R. C., takes flowers out, and replaces them in vase, to show the audience the water. Places vase on table R., beside the lamp. Goes through pantomime with his fingers on the exposed wires. Turns the light out; and then turns it on again. This is the cue for BOB to knock at R. U. door*)

(*Knock at door.*)

(*Covers exposed wires with magazine—sits on couch R.*) Come in.

BOB. (*enters*) Hello, Dick, hope I don't intrude on your divine afflatus, or anything like that.

DICK. No, Bob, I wasn't writing.

BOB. What's the matter? Has your Muse gone on a strike, or are you waiting for an inspiration?

DICK. Yes, Bob, that's it. I'm waiting for an inspiration.

BOB. Well, for the love of Mike, let's have a little light. (*goes R.—turns on switch below door—lights 2 wall brackets*) Well, then, why don't you do your waiting down stairs? It's a dashed sight more inspiring down there. Have you seen the pippin Elsie brought home with her from college?

DICK. No, Bob, I haven't. I've other things to think about just now.

BOB. Well, forget it, because I've got a little bet on that I could bring you down stairs. (*c. front of desk*)

DICK. I'm sorry, but I can't.

BOB. Dearie me, what's the matter? Got another rejection slip from Munsey's magazine?

DICK. No, Bob. Do you remember that life insurance policy that you sold me over a year ago?

BOB. (*L. of desk*) Do I? I should guess yes. \$25,000; the first big one I ever wrote. Want some more?

DICK. No.

BOB. A little accident insurance, perhaps? Eh? Now, my company sells a policy that will give you two thousand dollars for a leg.

DICK. (*crossing to BOB*) Want a light?

BOB. Thanks. (*crosses to end of divan R.—lights cigarette*)

DICK. I've just been glancing through this policy. By the way, Bob, you once confided to me that you hoped some day to be able to ask my sister to marry you.

BOB. Hope you don't think I've forgotten it.—

DICK. Don't think me impertinent, Bob; I've an excellent reason for wanting to know if you are still of the same mind.

BOB. - (*sits on arm of divan*) I certainly am. My company's promised me the first district managership that's open. When I get that I'm going to put my fortune to the touch; but just at present, well, my father's a parson, and none of the rest of the family ever had any money either.

DICK. Have you said anything to Elsie?

BOB. Don't be an ass, of course I haven't. (*crosses to DICK*) Of course, I've dropped a few hints. I've said that I thought no chap had any right to ask a girl to marry him unless he was sure he could take care of her, and I said that I had about as much money as you could get for a mortgage on a one cent stamp, but I really haven't said anything.

DICK. What did she say?

BOB. She said she hoped I'd be very successful in business.

DICK. I see.

BOB. What did you want to know about that policy?

DICK. I've just been glancing through it. What I want to know is this. Suppose I were to die suddenly, by accident, say tomorrow or tonight.

BOB. I say, Dick, I wish you wouldn't talk like that; it makes a chap feel uncomfortable.

DICK. I might, you know.

BOB. Well. . . .

DICK. When would the money be paid?

BOB. In the ordinary course of business, the money would be paid to your father in about thirty days.

DICK. That's not very soon, is it?

BOB. Well, people aren't generally in any great hurry. In the first place, there's the funeral; that's a three days' affair and it takes a few days to get over that; and then it's generally ten days to a fortnight before people are sufficiently over their grief to look on the bright side of things.

DICK. But supposing this were an unusual case. Supposing there were some special, urgent need for the money? Couldn't it be done sooner?

BOB. Mm—it might.

DICK. Say within two days?

BOB. Not unless somebody had a pull with the company.

DICK. Well, you have a pull with the company, haven't you?

BOB. Fair.

DICK. I don't know much about these things, but I was wondering whether, supposing I should die tonight, the money could be paid to my father not later than Thursday noon.

BOB. Not unless somebody on the inside boosted it along.

DICK. You could do that, couldn't you?

BOB. Oh, yes, I suppose I could. Look here, Dick, you talk as if you were going to kill yourself.

DICK. I am—tonight.

BOB. Say, if this is a joke—

DICK. I wish it were a joke. Listen, Bob. My dad's in terrible trouble.

BOB. Trouble?

DICK. He endorsed an old friend's notes for a big sum, the old friend turned out a crook, dad had to make good in a hurry. He borrowed the bank's

money to do it. At the same time, certain enterprises in which he was heavily interested went to the bad. The long and short of it is that dad can't make good.

BOB. Can't make good?

DICK. He borrowed the bank's money and he can't repay it, and the deficit is certain to be discovered when the Bank Examiner comes next Friday.

BOB. Are you sure he can't raise it somehow?

DICK. He has realized on everything he has in the world. Borrowed from every human being who would lend him a nickel. Oh, he's raised the greater part of it, but he's still \$20,000 short.

BOB. Twenty thousand dollars, that's not so terribly much. (*crosses R.*)

DICK. Isn't it? Then perhaps you could let me have it.

BOB. Twenty thousand dollars! My whole family couldn't raise \$2,000 to save all our lives.

DICK. You see.

BOB. (*crosses to DICK*) But your father's a man of consequence in business. Are you sure he's done everything possible?

DICK. Does a man like my father leave any stone unturned when he's facing a prison term for embezzlement?

BOB. Embezzlement?

(*R. of desk.*)

DICK. (*goes U. L.*) Oh, Bob, he never meant it, never in the world; but that won't save him, so you see it's up to me.

BOB. You don't mean—you can't mean—no, Dick, I won't stand for it.

DICK. There's nothing else.

BOB. There must be.

DICK. What?

BOB. You have relatives; surely they would hock the very clothes on their backs in a time like this.

DICK. (*crosses R.*) Yes, we've got relatives, but for the most part the only clothes they've got are the clothes on their backs. They haven't a hundred dollars between them. Dad's supported most of them for years.

BOB. But this house.

DICK. Mortgaged. Same with the Marblehead place. Every rag in it, every stick of furniture, every share of stock—there's not a thing left, not a thing, and it's not enough.

BOB. (*at c.*) You mean you're going to die for a matter of \$20,000?

DICK. No, for my father—my mother and sister. Listen, Bob, (*crosses to BOB*) I can't take any chances, there must be no ifs or buts about this thing. My father's got to have \$20,000 no later than Thursday noon, just so sure as the sun rises on that day. I know of only one way to get it with absolute certainty, and even that way is only certain with your help. Listen, Bob, if my father goes to prison his life will be ruined, my mother's life will be ruined. God! I think it would kill her; and my sister, her whole future would be darkened; but me, I'm only one, I'm not married nor engaged nor even in love. Oh, yes, they'd grieve for me, bless 'em, but there would be no dark disgrace to shadow all their lives.

BOB. Not when they knew you'd killed yourself?

DICK. They'll never know that.

BOB. What do you mean?

DICK. There's an anti-suicide clause in that policy, isn't there?

BOB. Yes.

DICK. And if there were the least suspicion, there would be some delay about the payment, wouldn't there?

BOB. I suppose so.

DICK. Then there must be no suspicion. I shall die in such a way that nobody would know it was anything but an accident. (*crosses to electrolier R.*) You see this electric light, see these wires, they are quite bare. I can touch them and only get a trifling shock, see? They are harmless enough now; but I happen to know a little about electricity, and I know that out here, living at the distance we do from town, a high potential current of some twenty-five hundred volts is required to carry electricity this far. Seventeen hundred volts is all they give murderers at Sing Sing. Why didn't I drop dead when I touched those wires? Because down stairs in the cellar is a thing called a transformer which reduces the high potential into a low potential current; but if you were to go to that transformer, say, late at night, and short-circuit the primary and secondary coils and then touch those wires—instant death. Listen, Bob: this is the obvious picture of my death which will be easily constructed. After going to bed, something occurred to me, as it often does, that I wanted to put on paper before I forgot it. In the dark I came back into this room. In groping about, I upset this vase of flowers; the water in the vase spilled on the floor about here. Standing barefooted in the water I groped for the light and by accident I touched the naked wires whose insulation was worn off; the whole force of the current shot through my body, and I died without a sound. (*crosses to Bob O.*)

BOB. Dick!

DICK. Now, do be quiet, Bob, because here's where you come in. You'll come to this house at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning. You and I had arranged to go for a drive in the country. Of course, you'll find the whole place upset; then you'll get your

company's medical inspector on the job, do anything you can—use your pull—put it through and see that my father gets the money no later than Thursday noon. Why, no one can suspect. No one will ever dream that I had the slightest reason for committing suicide; and, oh, yes, that's a good idea. . . . I'll write Arthur Williams and ask him to come and play golf with me tomorrow. I'll do that now. (*goes back of desk*)

BOB. (*R. of desk*) Dick, it's damnable.

DICK. Bob, if you were in my place tonight, what would you do? (*pause—knock on door*) Come in, who is it?

(*ELAINE enters. BOB goes to her.*)

ELAINE. Well, Mr. Caswell.

BOB. Well!

ELAINE. I thought ~~you~~ said that you could bring him down stairs.

BOB. I tried.

ELAINE. You tried and failed. Now suppose you go down and leave me with the enemy.

BOB. I can't.

ELAINE. You can't, but you will. Remember, I am she who must be obeyed; run along.

(*BOB turns doubtfully to RICHARD.*)

DICK. That's all right, you'll see me later.

(*BOB exits R. U.*)

ELAINE. (*R. of desk*) Well, he's a cheerful little chap, isn't he? Now I suppose you're wondering who I am. I'm Elaine Foster, and you might as well make up your mind to be nice to me, because your sister brought me home with her for the Easter holidays. How do you do?

DICK. How do you do, Miss Foster. Won't you sit down?



ELAINE. Well, that's decent of you, anyway. I rather expected you to bite me. (*goes front of desk to L. Then up L.*)

DICK. Bite you!

ELAINE. I was assured that your study was a sort of sacred spot that must not be invaded on pain of death; so you see what brave things a woman can do when she's angry. (*L. of desk*)

DICK. Angry. Are you angry?

ELAINE. I am.

DICK. With whom?

ELAINE. With you.

DICK. With me? What for?

ELAINE. (*L. of desk*) I'm not used to being treated in this manner.

DICK. What do you mean?

ELAINE. Well, here I come from Vassar with your sister on a visit. I've been hearing about you for years, sister being for some queer reason rather proud of you. I've even read your name in the magazines two or three times.

DICK. I thank you.

ELAINE. I rather liked that story of yours about the man with the pink hair.

DICK. (*R. of desk*) I thank you.

ELAINE. Well, naturally, under the circumstances, I expected a little attention. I'm not exactly negligible.

DICK. So it seems.

ELAINE. But you don't appear at dinner, and me wearing my newest gown; and after dinner you send word you're not coming down at all; well, naturally I'm peevish. I'm not used to that sort of thing, and I don't like it.

DICK. Really, I'm very sorry, but the fact is—

ELAINE. When I don't like anything, I say so. I'm saying so now. (*sits L.*)

DICK. (*goes to her*) Really, Miss Foster, I'm terribly sorry to have been so rude. The fact is, I didn't realize. Is there anything I can do to make up for it?

ELAINE. (*rises*) Yes, come down stairs and play with us. You do know how to play, don't you?

DICK. I've seldom done anything else.

ELAINE. Then come along. (*goes back of desk towards door R.*)

DICK. I'm afraid I can't.

ELAINE. Why not? (*comes down R. to C.*)

DICK. I've something to do.

ELAINE. Put it off. Come. Really, I think you might like me when you know me. You mustn't mind my coarse, rough ways. Despite an unpromising exterior, I'm really rather nice.

DICK. That seems most likely.

ELAINE. Then you'll come? . . . . Not when I've come a'tapping, tapping, tapping at your study door?

DICK. Well, perhaps—

ELAINE. I could carry the parody even further. You remember there's something in it about "Never More?"

DICK. (*significantly*) Yes, so there is, "Never More."

ELAINE. And it isn't every night that strange young ladies come a'tapping at your study door, is it?

DICK. Hardly.

ELAINE. Well, then, come along. (*starts toward door R.*)

DICK. I'm afraid I can't. (*L. of desk*)

ELAINE. Why can't you?

DICK. I've something important to do.

ELAINE. (*either side of armchair C.*) Oh, working out a story, I suppose?

DICK. Yes, that's it, I was working out a story.

ELAINE. What's the matter? Won't it come right?

DICK. No, there seems to be nothing but tragedy at the end of it.

ELAINE. Oh, I see. Of course, you're looking for the happy ending so popular with the public.

DICK. I'm afraid there's no happy ending to this.

ELAINE. Are you sure?

DICK. Certain.

ELAINE. (*sits on arm of chair*) Well, of course, you should have been sure of your ending before you began your story.

DICK. I was.

ELAINE. Then why do it at all?

DICK. I've got to. I—I can't help it.

ELAINE. Oh, the creative instinct driving you on. I can understand that. You see, I try to write myself.

DICK. Oh, do you?

ELAINE. Yes. It interests me—plots and construction and all that sort of thing. I like to see the wheels go 'round. (*rises*)

DICK. Oh, yes. Sister's told me how clever you are.

ELAINE. Oh, I wouldn't call it cleverness. It's just a feeling about things. All my life I've been doing things that people said were perfectly crazy, but I've always felt that they would come out all right and they always did, and just now I've got a feeling about you.

DICK. About me?

ELAINE. Yes. I've got a feeling that I can help you find your happy ending.

DICK. I'm afraid you don't realize the difficulty of this problem.

ELAINE. The more difficult, the better. Anyone can solve an easy problem.

DICK. There are some that can't be solved.

ELAINE. Don't you believe it. There's always a way out. The trick is to find it.

(*Enter BOB and ELSIE.*)

ELSIE. Well, Elaine, have you persuaded Dick to go to the dance with us?

ELAINE. No, Elsie, I'm afraid I haven't. (*goes back of ELSIE, divan and down R.*)

DICK. But isn't Bob going to take you?

ELSIE. Yes, but I want you all to go.

BOB. I say, Elsie, do we have to go to this confounded dance?

ELSIE. I do, anyhow. I promised Sallie.

ELAINE. (*crosses to ELSIE*) Elsie, you won't mind if I don't go, will you?

ELSIE. What's the matter with you folks? You know this dance is a perfectly respectable affair.

ELAINE. I thought I'd like to stay home and talk to your big brother. It's probably the only chance I'll have, and I'd better make the most of it.

ELSIE. Well, he isn't much to talk to tonight. (*ELAINE sits on divan.*) (*Crossing to DICK*) Dick, what is the matter with you?

DICK. Now, don't you bother about me.

ELSIE. And what did you do to Bob?

DICK. I?

ELSIE. He was perfectly all right when he went up stairs to see you, but when he came down . . . . look at him now.

BOB. What's the matter with me?

DICK. I don't think he looks any worse than usual.

BOB. Humph!

ELAINE. He's going to a dance, that's why he looks so bright and gay.

BOB. (*crossing to DICK*) Dick, about that damn thing you were talking to me about—

DICK. (*goes U. L.* BOB *sits -chair- L.*) Bob, please—

ELSIE. Oh, Elaine, why won't you go with us?

ELAINE. The fact is, Elsie, your brother and I are talking shop.

ELSIE. Shop!

ELAINE. Yes, we are discussing the plot of a story he is writing, and if it's all the same to you we'd rather go on doing it. At least, I would; but, of course— (*rises—goes back of divan*)

DICK. Oh, no, please don't go—please. Do stay.

ELSIE. Oh, I see. Well, we're not going for fifteen minutes. If you've got Dick's little masterpiece all straightened out by then, come on down stairs; if not, we'll go without you. Besides, I'll only stay an hour or so.

ELAINE. Will you tell your mother where we are?

ELSIE. I'll tell her when she comes down. She's upstairs with father. Ready, Bob? (*No answer. Crosses to BOB L.*) Mr. Caswell, are you ready? Come on, we're going to a dance, not a funeral. (*drags BOB to door*)

DICK. Make my excuses to Sallie, won't you? (*going to door, calling after her*)

ELSIE. I will not; make them yourself.

(BOB and ELSIE *exit.*)

ELAINE. (*sits on divan*) Now, then, let's put our heads together and see if we can't find that happy ending.

DICK. It's awfully good of you, but I'm afraid it isn't really worth your while. (*going L.*)

ELAINE. A happy ending is always worth while. Come on, read me your story.

DICK. Well, you see, I haven't written it; I've only planned it.

ELAINE. So much the better; then you can tell it to me.

DICK. Yes—but—

ELAINE. You'd better try me. I might be able to help you. I'm rather good at that sort of thing.

DICK. I believe I will. Do you mind if I smoke? (L. of desk)

ELAINE. No—I tried to learn, but I'm afraid I'm not up-to-date.

DICK. Well—this story is about a person who—

ELAINE. Man or woman?

DICK. Oh, a girl, a young girl. (R. corner of desk)

ELAINE. About my age?

DICK. Yes—this girl owes everything to her . . . . . uncle. He's a banker—brought her up—educated her—he's given her everything in the world. She loves him deeply.

ELAINE. Yes.

DICK. Well, he's in trouble—financially—lost all his money—borrowed trust funds he can't pay back—took them from the bank.

ELAINE. Stole them?

DICK. That's what the law would say; but he didn't mean any harm.

ELAINE. I see. Danger of discovery.

DICK. (R. of desk) Yes, in four days: unless he can raise \$20,000 in four days, certain discovery—ruin—prison. And, for his wife and daughter, disgrace.

ELAINE. And you want this girl to save him.

DICK. Yes.

ELAINE. How?

DICK. She has a life insurance policy he bought for her—\$25,000.

ELAINE. I see. You mean for her to give her life to—

DICK. Yes.

ELAINE. But this policy, would it be paid in case of suicide?

DICK. (*at lamp R.*) No. So she plans to make it look like an accident. (*turns on and off current*)

ELAINE. How?

DICK. Haven't quite worked it out yet. (*goes to desk*)

ELAINE. It won't be easy.

DICK. No, it won't. (*sits on R. corner of desk*)

ELAINE. There must be some other way.

DICK. I wish to God there were.

ELAINE. Twenty thousand dollars. It ought to be possible to raise that amount if one had time.

DICK. (*rises*) But he hasn't the time.

ELAINE. He? . . . . . Oh, the uncle.

DICK. I mean there isn't time.

ELAINE. Tell me. Has this girl any other relatives?

DICK. No.

ELAINE. (*goes to DICK*) Well, I think it would be better if it were her father who was in trouble; because then, you see, she would be giving her life not only for her father but for her mother and sister as well; isn't that so?

DICK. Perhaps it is.

ELAINE. Strange you didn't think of that!

DICK. (*goes L.*) Oh, I don't know, it's just a detail.

ELAINE. It is better that way; make it father and daughter, or even—yes, of course—make it father and son. (*goes to DICK*)

DICK. (*L. of desk*) Yes, yes, but er—the situation is just the same.

ELAINE. Of course; the point is, is there any way out?

DICK. Yes, that's the point—is there any way out? (*knock at the door*)

DICK. Come in.

(*The maid, MARY, enters R. U.*)

MAID. There's a man at the door, Mr. Richard, wants to see Mr. Howard. He seems rather excited, so I thought I'd better let you know.

DICK. Tell him that it is impossible for him to see my father, that he's ill in bed.

MAID. I did tell him that, sir, but he said he's got to see him—says he won't go away till he does see him.

DICK. What's his name?

MAID. Mr. Burns—I think, sir.

DICK. Burns?

MAID. Yes, sir. I think he's been here once or twice before.

DICK. Oh, has Miss Elsie gone out yet?

MAID. No, sir.

DICK. Then I suppose I'll have to see him, up here. I'm sorry.

ELAINE. Oh, that's all right.

DICK. Show him up.

(*MAID exits.*)

ELAINE. See here—if I go downstairs now, they'll drag me off to that blessed dance. Can't you put me somewhere till your man is gone?

DICK. Certainly. You can wait in mother's sitting room. It's right through there. (*Goes through doors C. Lights*)

ELAINE. Oh, that will do perfectly.

DICK. I wish you'd come back in five minutes. He's probably some horrible bore, and it will be a good excuse to get rid of him.

ELAINE. All right—five minutes.



(Exits c. Door slams.)

DICK. (*closes curtains. MAID shows MR. BYRNE in, and exits*) Oh—Mr. Byrne, how do you do! The maid said Burns. I beg your pardon. I understand you want to see my father.

BYRNE. (*carrying his hat, uncomfortably*) Yes.

DICK. I'm sorry, he's ill, confined to his bed.

BYRNE. Don't make any difference; I've got to see him.

DICK. I'm sorry, but you can't. Is there anything I can do?

BYRNE. No, there's nothing you can do. I've got to see your father, and I tell you I will. (BYRNE *sits on divan*)

DICK. I suppose you realize your conduct is, to say the least, extraordinary.

BYRNE. I don't care a damn about that. I've got to see Mr. Howard and I'm going to. It's a matter of the utmost importance.

DICK. To him or to you?

BYRNE. To both of us.

DICK. Mr. Byrne, my father is suffering from a nervous breakdown. Rest and quiet are essential to him, so of course I cannot let you see him.

BYRNE. I tell you I'll not leave this house without seeing him.

DICK. I'm afraid you'll have to.

BYRNE. (*gets up angrily*) Will I? Will I? Then I'll stand on the steps and beat on the door—I'll raise a row that you'll never forget if you live to be a hundred. Now you listen to me. You'd better let me see him if you know what's good for yourself, and for him, too.

DICK. Mr. Byrne, you're evidently very much excited about something. In your present condition you are the last person in the world who ought to see my father.

BYRNE. That's all right. But I tell you, see him I will. (*crosses L. About to sit*)

DICK. Not unless you give me a reason. (*crosses to c.*)

BYRNE. (*crosses to DICK*) All right, then I will. Now, I didn't want to tell you, remember that, you're driving me to it, but I've got to see him and I don't care what I say to do it.

DICK. All right, what is it?

BYRNE. I've been paying teller in your father's bank for the last ten years; naturally I got to know him pretty well. He was always pretty decent to me.

DICK. Yes, that's his way.

BYRNE. About three weeks ago he came to me and said that if I had two thousand dollars to spare he thought he saw his way to double it for me in a year. Well, the proposition looked pretty good to me, so I fell for it; let him have the money on his note.

DICK. Well, what of it?

BYRNE. A few days after, the night watchman happened to mention that your father was working late at the bank the night before. I asked him if he'd been in the vaults, and he said yes. I don't know why, but it set me thinking; then your father fell sick and didn't come to the bank at all, so I did a little night work myself, and it didn't take me long to find out that the bank was short thousands of dollars.

DICK. Mr. Byrne, do you realize what you're saying?

BYRNE. I do. I'm saying the bank is short and that your father knows it, and it won't be long before everybody else knows it.

DICK. Why, there's not a word of truth in what you say.

BYRNE. (*crosses L. and sits*) I wish to God there wasn't.

DICK. And even granting it were true, I can't quite see—

BYRNE. Can't you? Then I'll tell you. The moment the truth comes out, the bank examiner will step in. The bank's doors will be shut, there'll be a receiver, your father'll be a bankrupt—a convict for all I know. A bankrupt anyhow: and then what'll happen to my two thousand dollars?

DICK. Two thousand dollars—that isn't very much.

BYRNE. (*rises*) Isn't it? It's more than half of all I've saved for my wife and kiddies, and I tell you flat I'll not leave this house without it; I'm damned if I do.

DICK. (*goes L. U.*) Ssh—Ssh, please, please.

BYRNE. (*crosses R.*) Ah, you're afraid somebody'll hear about it. Well, they'll all hear about it if I don't see your father tonight. You can throw me out if you want to; d'you think that will stop my mouth? I'll stand in the middle of the street, and shout "thief" at the top of my voice—"thief." (*lowering his voice*) Do you hear that—"thief."

DICK. (*crosses to BYRNE*) Mr. Byrne, if I didn't know you, I'd think you either a blackmailer or a lunatic; but I can't have my father disturbed tonight. Won't you please sit down, please, please. (*BYRNE sits on divan*) I'll make you this offer. I'll draw up a receipt for \$2,000; *this* you will sign.

BYRNE. Will I?

DICK. After I have given you my check for \$2,000.

BYRNE. How do I know the check's any good?

DICK. I shall date it three days ahead. On Thursday afternoon there'll be funds to meet it.

BYRNE. How do I know there will?

DICK. You don't. You've got to take my word for it.

BYRNE. Ha!

DICK. Well, don't you see, if what you say is true, it's your only chance to get your money? Don't you see that?

BYRNE. No, I'm damned if I do.

DICK. Then I'll tell you. (ELAINE comes in unseen). No matter what happens, you will not be allowed to see my father. That is final. Then, if, as you threaten, you proclaim your charges to the world, and what you say is true, exposure will follow, the bank will close, my father will be a bankrupt, (ELAINE goes out again) and your money will be irretrievably gone. Is that clear? (pause) Well, what do you say?

BYRNE. (rises—crosses L.) Well, I guess I'll have to take a chance.

DICK. All right. (goes to desk and sits to write. Knock at the door) Who is it?

MRS. HOWARD. (in hall) It's I, Dick.

DICK. Oh, just a moment, Mother, please. (rises. To BYRNE) It's my mother, Mr. Byrne. Seeing you here—you can understand—she might be worried. Would you mind waiting in here? (crosses L., opens door, L. lights)

BYRNE. How long will I have to wait?

DICK. Oh, I can't say exactly—not long—fifteen minutes at the most. I'll call you.

BYRNE. Well—I'll wait that long—just that long. (exits)

DICK. Come in, Mother. Anything the matter?

MRS. HOWARD. Dick, I'm so worried about your father.

DICK. What's the matter? Can't he go to sleep?

MRS. HOWARD. He's just dropped off—it isn't

that; but—he acts as if he had something on his mind. I can't quite make it out.

DICK. Oh, it's nothing, Mother, just overwork—that's all.

MRS. HOWARD. Hasn't he said anything to you?

DICK. Why, no, nothing special. It's just nerves. I wouldn't ask him any questions. Rest is all he needs. Just help him to rest.

MRS. HOWARD. I've been thinking, Dick, that when he's a little better, we might take him to California.

DICK. We'll talk it all over when the time comes—later—not now. Good night, Mother, and don't worry.

MRS. HOWARD. I'll try not to; but if anything should happen to your father I don't know what I'd do.

DICK. Yes, yes, I know, I know, Mother. Now, don't you worry. Everything is going to be all right. Good night, Mother.

MRS. HOWARD. Good night, my son.

(*They kiss. MRS. HOWARD exits R. U. DICK crosses L. to get BYRNE. ELAINE enters C.*)

ELAINE. Wait!

DICK. (*as he turns and sees her*) Oh, Miss Foster, I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to excuse me; rather a troublesome matter of business has—

ELAINE. Wait. That story of yours with the tragic ending. It's your own. (U. L. C.)

DICK. What! You heard?

ELAINE. Yes, something.

DICK. How much?

ELAINE. Enough. Oh, I didn't mean to listen; but after the first few words I couldn't go away. Are you angry?

DICK. (*goes R. front of desk*) Angry? No. I was a fool, a fool to tell you. Oh, I'm sorry.

ELAINE. (*follows DICK*) So that's what ails Mr. Caswell. He knows.

DICK. Yes. I had to tell him, so that the policy would be promptly paid.

ELAINE. Listen, you must send this man away at once.

DICK. I tried to. He wouldn't go. The only way I can get rid of him is to give him a check for his money. The only way I can make the check good—there's no other way. (*goes L.*)

ELAINE. We must find another way.

DICK. *We?* You talk as if it were your affair.

ELAINE. It is. From now on I make it so.

DICK. Oh, don't—don't make it any harder for me. You overheard, that was an accident. I'm sorry. Just forget everything you know.

ELAINE. I can't forget. There must be some other way. Time is all we need. Time to think! We must put this man off.

DICK. S'sh! How? If I throw him out he will make a roar and then the whole thing will come out. Don't you see?

ELAINE. Leave him to me. I'll think of some way to get rid of him.

DICK. He's desperate, I tell you.

ELAINE. Give me ten minutes. If he's not gone by then, come back.

DICK. What then?

ELAINE. We'll tell him the truth and throw ourselves on his mercy. That's all we can do. At any rate, I'll make him promise to keep quiet.

DICK. But I tell you—

ELAINE. What did you say his name is?

DICK. Byrne.

ELAINE. Byrne. Is he married?

DICK. —Yes.

ELAINE. I've got an idea.

DICK. What is it?

ELAINE. (*goes U. L.*) I'll not tell you. You'd be like all the rest. You'd think I'm crazy. Well, maybe I am, but I'm going to try it. I'll get this man out of this house if I have to blast him out.

DICK. But if there should be any trouble. . . .

ELAINE. I'll call you. Please trust me.

DICK. I will.

ELAINE. Remember, I'm to have ten minutes; and you're not to listen.

DICK. (*goes U. C.*) All right. It's a quarter to ten. At five minutes to ten I'm coming back. (*exits C.*)

ELAINE. Good! (*to door L. and calls*) Oh, Mr. Byrne.

BYRNE. Yes.

ELAINE. Will you come here a moment, please? (*crosses to door C. Closes curtains*)

BYRNE. Beg pardon. (*coming down L.*)

ELAINE. Mr. Howard has gone with his mother for a few moments, (*BYRNE goes R. C.*) and he asked me to entertain you until he comes back.

BYRNE. I don't think I need much entertainment.

ELAINE. (*L. C.*) I should think from the look of you that you need a great deal.

BYRNE. Well, I'm not much of a ladies' man.

ELAINE. You have been, though.

BYRNE. Eh?

ELAINE. You're married, aren't you?

BYRNE. How did you know that?

ELAINE. You have a married look.

BYRNE. Humph!

ELAINE. I'm Miss Foster. (*offering her hand*)

BYRNE. (*doubtfully*) How do you do.

ELAINE. I'm a guest here.

BYRNE. Relative?

ELAINE. No, not yet. (BYRNE *stares*) I said, not yet.

BYRNE. I heard you, I heard you.

ELAINE. Won't you let me take your hat? Won't you sit down? Please, please. (*he sits on divan B. Business*) Won't you smoke?

BYRNE. I don't smoke: against the rules in the bank, against the rules in the subway, wife don't allow it in the house.

ELAINE. Mr. Byrne, (*she edges coquettishly up to him on the sofa*) you don't wish me any harm, do you?

BYRNE. You? Heavens, no.

ELAINE. I thought not.

BYRNE. Why should I? I never saw you before in all my life.

ELAINE. Yet you are doing me an irreparable injury, Mr. Byrne.

BYRNE. You don't say so!

ELAINE. Yes.

BYRNE. Why, what the hell— Oh, I beg pardon!

ELAINE. Oh. it's quite all right—it's quite all right. Won't you please sit down again, Mr. Byrne, please? (BYRNE *sits*. *She sits on the tail of his coat. He snatches it away*) Mr. Byrne, I'm sailing for Europe in the morning, on the Baltic. I must sail then, my—my mother is dangerously ill—in—ah—London. Yes, I must sail then, Mr. Byrne. You see that, don't you?

BYRNE. Go ahead, I'm not stopping you.

ELAINE. I said to you just now that I was a guest here.

BYRNE. I heard you.

ELAINE. Ah, but the fact is—I am—er, I was—on the verge of a much closer footing.

BYRNE. Eh?



ELAINE. When the maid came in to announce your most inopportune arrival I was in the act of persuading Mr. Howard to propose to me.

BYRNE. (*rises*) Well, good gracious!

ELAINE. Now you can easily imagine how I felt, can't you?

BYRNE. (*crosses L. c.*) No, I can't.

ELAINE. Can't you?

BYRNE. No. See here, young lady, I came in here on a matter of business.

ELAINE. (*crosses to him*) (*talking him down*) As I was saying—as I was saying—(*BYRNE stops talking*) As I was saying, there was I, in my prettiest gown,—I'm wearing it now, do you like it? Paquin made it; mother sent it to me for a birthday present. Poor mother, I wonder if I shall ever see her alive again. (*begins to cry on his shoulder*)

BYRNE. Oh, say now, Miss Foster, please don't cry.

ELAINE. No, I mustn't, must I? I must be brave. Well, where was I?

BYRNE. I don't know.

ELAINE. Oh, there was I, in my prettiest gown, at the very moment I'd been working up to for years. Mr. Howard had just opened his mouth to ask me to be his wife—and then you came. It's—it's too much, Mr. Byrne—it's too much. (*begins crying again*)

BYRNE. Well, never mind, I'm going away again.

ELAINE. Oh, go now, won't you?

BYRNE. Not much. Not till I get my \$2,000 check.

ELAINE. I'll make Mr. Howard promise to mail it to you just as soon as I finish my business with him. You'll get it the first thing in the morning. Oh, dear, dear man, go now, and I'll love you all my life.

BYRNE. (*crosses R. c.*) Not till I finish my business.

ELAINE. Then it will be too late for mine.

BYRNE. I can't, I can't—

ELAINE. (*goes c.*) Oh, why can't you do your business during business hours? These are my business hours, not yours.

BYRNE. But—

ELAINE. How'd you like to have people bothering around when you were putting through the biggest business deal of your life?

BYRNE. Business! You call that business?

ELAINE. Yes, the biggest business of a woman's life—getting married.

BYRNE. (*taking a step down stage*) Well, what do you think of that?

ELAINE. (*opens door R., crosses to BYRNE and pulls him toward door*) Oh, you will go, you will, you can't refuse. You see what it means to me, it's all my life. Go—go now, and come again at five o'clock tomorrow. I'll be gone by then; but happy, happy, in spite of poor dear mother, and you'll have done it, Mr. Byrne, think of that, and I'll love you when I'm an old, old lady and my hair is white as snow.

BYRNE. Well, I'll do it; damned if I know why I'll do it, but I'll do it.

(*He exits. ELAINE begins laughing, crosses to divan and sits. DICK enters.*)

DICK. (*looking about room*) He's gone?

ELAINE. Yes, he's gone.

DICK. (*closes door L. after looking off*) He's really gone?

ELAINE. Yes, he's really gone.

DICK. How on earth did you get rid of him?

ELAINE. I'll never tell you that.

DICK. Why not?

ELAINE. There are reasons.

DICK. (*going to ELAINE*) Oh, thank you, thank you.

ELAINE. Now we've got to find a way out.

DICK. There's no way out.

ELAINE. (*rises and goes c.*) Of course there is. There must be. I had a flash of something, just a flash, while I was talking to that brute of a Byrne. Something about a story.

DICK. (*sits on divan R.*) Story?

ELAINE. Yes, story, story, story. There! that's it. It's a good story as it stands, isn't it? (*goes to DICK*)

DICK. I haven't thought of it in that light.

ELAINE. Why, you told it to me as a story.

DICK. Yes, but I wasn't thinking of it as a story.

ELAINE. That's what it is, though; so write it.

DICK. Write it?

ELAINE. Yes, write it. Just as it's happened.

DICK. Suppose I did.

ELAINE. Write it and sell it.

DICK. What! For \$20,000?

ELAINE. No, \$25,000.

DICK. (*rises*) Did you ever hear of anybody getting \$25,000 for a short story?

ELAINE. No; but I have for a play.

DICK. You mean—

ELAINE. Why not write it as a play?

DICK. By George!

ELAINE. You've written plays, haven't you?

DICK. Yes, yes; but time . . . . .!

ELAINE. How soon must you have this money?

DICK. Friday morning.

ELAINE. This is Monday night, three days. You could write this play in twenty-four hours, couldn't you? Of course you could. It's your own, your very own, you'd be writing it in your own blood. Listen, write it just as it's happened.

DICK. I see. Put all of us in it.

ELAINE. Yes, your father, your mother, your sister.

DICK. Yes, and you too, and me.

ELAINE. Of course. Everybody that has had anything to do with it, including that brute of a Byrne.

DICK. (*goes to c.*) By George, if we only could.

ELAINE. Why not, Dick?

DICK. But look here, I don't know anybody who will give me \$25,000 for it. Do you?

ELAINE. Successful plays make a great deal more than that, don't they?

DICK. Yes, yes, I guess they do, but I couldn't even get into a manager's office.

ELAINE. But I can.

DICK. You can?

ELAINE. (*goes to DICK c.*) Now listen. When I came back from Europe last summer there was a man on the boat named Gilmore.

DICK. Not Charles Gilmore.

ELAINE. Exactly. I didn't know he was a theatrical manager, but there was a ship's concert and I did something or other and he hunted me up to say something nice.

DICK. But I don't quite see—

ELAINE. Don't you? I'll try to sell this play to Mr. Gilmore.

DICK. But do you know anything about the usual contracts for plays?

ELAINE. This isn't a usual play.

DICK. Why, an unknown author like me—

ELAINE. (*goes R. C.*) I know it sounds quite mad. I can't argue with you about it, it's a thing I feel, that's all. Now listen, Dick. Gilmore's in town—I saw an interview with him in the paper this morning—and we can get to him promptly, I'm sure. Oh, it's a chance, Dick, a long chance, and yet I've

got a feeling about it—

DICK. I know, but—

ELAINE. Besides, it's the only chance we've got.

DICK. But Elaine—

ELAINE. Look here, how long have we been calling each other by our Christian names?

DICK. I haven't the least idea.

ELAINE. Nor I.

DICK. Does it matter?

ELAINE. (*goes to DICK*) Not a bit. It's you and I together now. We've got our backs against the wall. We've got to fight for the happy ending. Will you do it?

DICK. It's a chance.

ELAINE. Will you do it?

DICK. Yes.

ELAINE. But you must be quite mad about it, just as I am. You've got to be.

DICK. (*goes L.—to chair back of desk—sits*) God bless you, I'll be as mad as you like. Come on, let's begin.

ELAINE. (*goes R. to back of desk*) Have you got plenty of paper?

DICK. Yes, Lord, if I had to, I could write it on my shirt.

ELAINE. Now think, it's the real story, you know. How did it begin?

DICK. Why, I got an idea father had something on his mind from something he let drop. The more I thought of it the more sure I became, so tonight I went to his room and got him to come here to my study.

ELAINE. There, that's it.

DICK. What?

ELAINE. Act 1, here in your study. You and your father, at this very desk, perhaps?

DICK. Yes.

ELAINE. Any lights?

DICK. No, not at first. Dad said it would be easier to tell me in the dark.

ELAINE. Splendid! Now, are you ready?

DICK. Yes.

ELAINE. (*dictating*) Act 1.—The curtain rises on a dark black stage.

DICK (*begins to write*) The curtain rises on  
. . . (*till curtain falls*)

CURTAIN

## ACT II

SCENE:—*Same as Act I.*

TIME:—10 A. M. of the morning after Act I.

RICHARD is DISCOVERED at his desk feverishly writing. The floor about his desk is covered with sheets of manuscript which he has obviously tossed forth as fast as he has written them. Although the hour is ten o'clock in the morning, the French windows are all closed and heavily curtained so as to exclude all daylight. The electric lights are turned on in the electrolier over his desk. It will later be made clear why this is done. After the curtain rises there is a short pause during which RICHARD writes rapidly. DICK takes cigarette from box on desk, lights it, gets up and walks up and down, thinking, then sits at desk and begins writing rapidly. There comes a knock on the door, to which he pays no attention. Another knock comes, the door opens, admitting MARY, the Maid; she bears a tray full of breakfast dishes.

MARY. Your breakfast, Mr. Richard. (no answer) Miss Foster said you wanted your breakfast sent up to your study. (RICHARD motions her to put it on table L. She arranges tray on table. Crosses to window U. L. and opens curtains)

DICK. Don't do that! (she closes curtains again)  
What time is it?

MARY. Ten o'clock, sir.

DICK. Morning or evening?

MARY. (amazed) Morning, of course, sir.

DICK. (motions MARY to get out. MARY goes

toward door, looking back at DICK. ELAINE enters, hustles MARY out)

ELAINE. Out with you, Mary. Fly! (to DICK) Hello.

DICK. Hello. (ELAINE crosses L. and puts hat and cloak in big chair U. L. Coming briskly to his desk)

ELAINE. Well, how's it going?

DICK. Oh, it's going, it's going.

ELAINE. Do you like it?

DICK. I don't know. It's true, anyhow.

ELAINE. How far have you got?

DICK. Almost as far as I can go.

ELAINE. What do you mean?

DICK. I'm nearly through the first act. Right up to the time I left you to get rid of Byrne; but I can't seem to think of the last thing I said before I left you. What was it?

ELAINE. Let's see; something about your coming back.

DICK. I remember; I looked at my watch.

ELAINE. Yes.

DICK. (*writing*) And I said, "It's a quarter of ten, at five minutes of ten I'm coming back."

ELAINE. Yes, that was it.

DICK. Now will you tell me how you got rid of Byrne? (ELAINE doesn't answer him. Crosses to table left)

ELAINE. Why, you haven't eaten your breakfast. (*she glances at tray*)

DICK. Eat! Lord, I haven't time to eat.

ELAINE. But you've got to. (*sees him smoking, crosses to him*) And smoking cigarettes before breakfast; you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

DICK. But I'm not hungry.

ELAINE. (*dragging him to table L.*) Doesn't



make any difference, you've got to eat. (*they both sit at table*) A little sugar on your grape fruit?

DICK. Please. (*she puts some on*)

ELAINE. Little more for luck. (*puts more on*)  
Coffee?

DICK. Yes, thanks.

ELAINE. Cream in your coffee?

DICK. (*eating grape fruit*) Uh, huh.

ELAINE. Sugar?

DICK. No, no sugar.

ELAINE. No sugar? (*DICK shakes his head. She pours his coffee*) There you are. Oh, say, this will have to go into the play.

DICK. This?

ELAINE. Yes, this breakfast table scene. Belasco always has one. You're not eating very much, but that's all right. They never do in plays, and no wonder. The stuff they give the poor actors. But you can eat everything here all right. This is regular food. Now, tell me, did you get any sleep?

DICK. Sleep! I don't feel as if I ever wanted to sleep again.

ELAINE. I was afraid you might; so about day-break, I came up and listened at your door.

DICK. No!

ELAINE. Yes. Presently I heard you walking about the room.

DICK. I don't wonder. I got so nervous I got up and moved the furniture about.

ELAINE. So then I knew it was all right, and stole away to bed again.

DICK. Look here. If I had been asleep, what would you have done?

ELAINE. Come in and waked you up, of course.

DICK. You would?

ELAINE. Oh, have some toast. (*shoves the toast at him*)

DICK. (*taking it*) Thanks. (ELAINE goes to window L., draws the curtains, letting in a flood of morning light which shows strangely against the artificial light of the room. Sharply.) Please don't do that.

ELAINE. Why not?

DICK. I always write by artificial light.

ELAINE. (*draws curtains again*) Sorry. (*sits L. of him, watching him eat*)

DICK. Sounds foolish, I suppose, but I seem to write better that way. Just a habit. It sort of shuts out everything but what I'm doing. Hope you don't mind.

ELAINE. Not at all. I can quite understand what you— (*knock on door*)

DICK. Come in. (*enter MRS. HOWARD, crossing to R. C.*) Good morning, Mother.

MRS. HOWARD. (*stares at sheets of paper on the floor and from them to the pair at the breakfast table*) Well, I hope I'm not intruding.

DICK. Don't be silly, Mother.

MRS. HOWARD. Passing your room, I noticed that your bed had not been slept in. You've not been up all night?

DICK. Yes, I have.

MRS. HOWARD. Dick!

DICK. Why not?

MRS. HOWARD. Well, I do think—

ELAINE. (*crosses to MRS. HOWARD*) I'm afraid I'm a little to blame, Mrs. Howard.

DICK. Nonsense.

ELAINE. Shut up.—The fact is, last night, Dick and I got talking about a story and he became so interested that he insisted on writing it at once. I tried to get him to put it off until today, but he wouldn't listen to me. (*DICK is a bit amazed by this whopper.* MRS. HOWARD crosses to DICK,

ELAINE *goes back of desk and examines manuscript*)

MRS. HOWARD. Oh, I know, he's so young and strong, he thinks he can stand anything, foolish boy. (*puts arm around his neck*)

ELSIE. (*enters from R. U. E., crosses R. C.*) Well, I like this! I've looked all over the house for you folks and here you are having a regular party.

MRS. HOWARD. What do you think Dick's been doing now?

ELSIE. (*in front of table*) Heaven knows.

MRS. HOWARD. Sitting up all night writing.

ELSIE. (*looking at sheets of paper on the floor*) It looks like it. My, but it must be interesting. (*picks up sheet and reads aloud*) "Dick: Not unless you give me a reason. Byrne: All right, then I will. I didn't want to tell you, remember that, you're driving me to it."

ELAINE. Dick! (*DICK turns and sees what ELSIE is doing, starts after her*)

DICK. Now, Sis, will you drop that? (*ELSIE starts to run R., pursued by DICK around right of sofa, then down to front of desk*) Now, Sis, don't play the fool. I'm in no humor for—will you drop it. I'll get angry in a minute. (*he catches her, takes sheet from her*) Now, you give that up, you little scoundrel.

ELSIE. All right, take your old story. I don't believe it's any good anyhow. (*crosses R.*)

DICK. (*back of the desk with ELAINE. MRS. HOWARD goes to window*) Never you mind whether it is or not. (*MRS. HOWARD draws curtains just as ELAINE has done. Exasperated.*) And don't do that!!

MRS. HOWARD. What is the matter, Dick?

DICK. I'm trying to write, I tell you. and I never write by daylight.

MRS. HOWARD. (*drawing the curtains back, and*

*then in a rather hurt voice:)* Oh, very well, of course; but I do think it's wrong to shut out the sunlight like this. It can't be healthy.

DICK. (*crosses to MRS. HOWARD, puts arm about her, and takes her R. U.* ELAINE *crosses to breakfast table L. and begins eating grape fruit.* ELSIE *crosses L. to ELAINE*) My dear mother. I'm much obliged to you for your interest, but I'm trying to tell you that I'm very busy on an important piece of work and I should be very much obliged if you'd go away and let me alone. (*leaves her at door and goes back to desk and arranges manuscript*)

MRS. HOWARD. Oh, very well. (*going*)

ELSIE. We shall be only too pleased, I'm sure. You're not very interesting. (*crosses R. U.*) Come on, Elaine, hats; two new ones just arrived.

ELAINE. Of course, if it's hats—

DICK. (*c. back of desk*) Now will you please let Elaine alone.

ELSIE. (*who now hears DICK call ELAINE by her Christian name for the first time*) Elaine! Why, Dick!

DICK. Why, yes, yes. I was just trying to make her feel at home. Hope she doesn't mind.

ELAINE. Not at all, Richard.

DICK. But I won't have you dragging her away like this. I want to talk to her about the story.

ELSIE. Anybody'd think she came to visit you, not me.

ELAINE. (*to RICHARD*) I'll come back later, if I may. (*ELSIE goes out*)

DICK. Not much later, please. (*DICK goes to chair back of desk*)

ELAINE. (*standing in door R. U. in a mock melodramatic fashion*) I go—but I return. (*she goes out*)

MRS. HOWARD. (*at the door*) I do wish you'd let in a little daylight.

DICK. (*exasperated*) Oh, now, mother, please, please.

MRS. HOWARD. All right, Dick, all right, I'm going, I'm going. (*she resigns herself to the inevitable and goes out. DICK shuts door after her. Goes to desk and falls to work again. Knock on door*)

DICK. Come in. (*MARY enters*) Well, what now?

MARY. The breakfast dishes, sir.

DICK. Well, for heaven's sake, take them and get out. (*pause*) And hustle!

MARY. Yes, sir. (*she takes tray and hurries to the door*)

DICK. If you come back here again, I'll skin you alive.

MARY. Yes, sir. (*she goes out—DICK shuts the door after her. Goes to desk. After looking through the drawers of the desk for copy paper, he exits C. BOB enters stealthily R. U. Is looking on floor near lamp as if expecting to see DICK dead. DICK enters C. with paper*)

DICK. Well, for heaven's sake, what are you doing here?

BOB. (*gasping*) Dick, Dick, Dick. (*seizing his hand*) Thank God, I—I thought you had done it.

DICK. Done it?

BOB. I sneaked in. No one saw me, and I slunk up stairs—I could imagine you lying dead on the floor under that accursed lamp; and I couldn't stand it any longer.

DICK. (*cooling*) Well, you see I haven't done it; and I'd be very much obliged to you if you'd get out.

BOB. Get out!

DICK. Yes, get out and let me work.

BOB. What on earth are you doing?

DICK. I'm writing a play.

BOB. Writing a play?

DICK. Yes, writing a play.

BOB. Well, I'll be— (*he collapses into chair R.*)

DICK. Well, why shouldn't I write a play? Everybody else does.

BOB. Are you crazy?

DICK. No, I'm not; and as I said before, I wish you would go away and let me alone.

BOB. (*gets up angrily and goes to RICHARD*)  
Look here, Dick, I'd like to know what you mean by this sort of thing.

DICK. What sort of thing?

BOB. When I left you last night, I didn't know whether I'd ever see you alive again or not. I—I didn't sleep a wink. I didn't even go to bed. I walked the streets all night. In a panic of fear, I open that door; and I find you—writing a play.

DICK. But my dear fellow, I—

BOB. (*crossing L. C.*) It's too much, that's what it is. A great deal too much.

DICK. If you'll give me a chance to ex—

BOB. Do you think this is a nice way to treat a friend?

DICK. But I tell you—

BOB. I'd like to know what the devil you mean by it. Writing a play.

DICK. Anybody'd think you were sorry to find me still alive.

BOB. Writing a play! Well, good God!

DICK. (*crosses to BOB*) See here, Bob, the fact is something has happened.

BOB. Then you're not going to do it?

DICK. I don't say that.

BOB. Then what do you say?

DICK. I say that I'm not going to do it quite yet.

BOB. And you expect me to go on holding my tongue about it?

DICK. Certainly.

BOB. (*crossing R. tearing his hair*) Good God! I'll be a raving maniac by tomorrow night. What on earth has happened? Has your father found a way out?

DICK. (*at C.*) No, nothing's really happened.

BOB. (*at R. C.*) Nothing's really happened, and you expect me to go on walking the streets and tearing my hair while you write a play.

DICK. Now, will you sit down and let me explain. (*DICK forces BOB in chair R.*) The fact is I've thought of something. Oh, it's so wild a thing that I can't even tell you about it, but I believe, I really believe there's a chance, and even if it should fail, there's still time for the other. Now do you see?

BOB. No, I'm hanged if I do.

DICK. Well, that's how it is. I wouldn't explain it to you if I had the time and I haven't got the time. Now seconds count, so if you love me, for heaven's sake, get out and let me work. (*urging him toward the door*)

BOB. On the play?

DICK. Yes, damn it, on the play.

BOB. Do you know, I think you're crazy?

DICK. I don't care what you think, if you'll only leave me alone.

BOB. If you think I can go on indefinitely waiting for you to make up your mind whether you're going to kill yourself or not you're mightily mistaken. (*crosses L.*)

DICK. Now, my dear Bob—(*knock on the door. DICK crosses and throws it open, MARY enters*) You! You, again? Now, didn't I tell you that if you came back again I'd—

MARY. Yes, sir; yes, sir, but it's—it's that Mr. Burns.

DICK. Burns? Byrne!

MARY. Yes, sir. He's down stairs again and says he's got to see you.

DICK. Oh, he does, eh? (*BYRNE appears at door, defiantly coming in*)

BYRNE. "Yes, he does, eh," and to make sure he does he takes the liberty of walking up stairs.

DICK. Oh, to be sure, won't you come in?

BYRNE. (*coming D. R.*) I am in. (*DICK pushes MARY out, closes door after her. DICK at c.*)

DICK. Mr. Byrne, Mr. Caswell.

BOB. How do you do?

BYRNE. Huh!

DICK. (*to BYRNE*) Well!

BYRNE. I should prefer to talk to you alone.

BOB. Oh, certainly, Dick. (*starts to go*)

DICK. Don't go, Bob. (*to BYRNE*) There's no necessity for privacy.

BYRNE. Just as you please.

DICK. I'm surprised to see you neglecting business at this hour of the morning.

BYRNE. I'm not neglecting my business. Make no mistake about that. (*BOB sits in chair L.*)

DICK. Well, what do you want?

BYRNE. You know, mighty well, what I want.

DICK. Oh, no, I don't. The last I saw of you, you were to wait in that room for fifteen minutes. I was to call you. I called you in ten and found you'd gone. Now, what do you mean by breaking your promise?

BYRNE. (*taken aback by this attack*) Well, now the fact is, eh—

DICK. Come, come, don't dodge.

BYRNE. Didn't the—ah—the young lady tell you?

DICK. Miss Foster?



BYRNE. Yes, Miss Foster, if that's her precious name. Didn't she tell you why I didn't wait?

DICK. She did not. Why didn't you wait?

BYRNE. (*much annoyed, yet forced to be a gentleman*) Well, if she didn't tell you, I don't see how in the name of heaven I can.

DICK. See here, I haven't the remotest idea what you're talking about. Have you, Bob?

BOB. (*rises and goes c.*) I haven't the remotest idea what either of you are talking about. (BYRNE crosses angrily to BOB)

BYRNE. Well, is it any of your business?

BOB. It might be. How the devil do I know?

(BOB goes to window and draws curtains. RICHARD goes up c. BYRNE crosses to R.)

DICK. Now, don't do that! (*wonderingly BOB closes curtains again, goes D. L. ELAINE enters, flabbergasted, of course, by the apparition of the unexpected BYRNE, but quick to recover herself. BYRNE sees her and backs away from her*)

ELAINE. (*going to BYRNE*) Ah, Mr. Byrne, how do you do? (*shakes hands with BYRNE*) Well, this is a surprise.

BYRNE. It is to me.

ELAINE. How are you?

BYRNE. You—you er—missed your boat.

ELAINE. Boat? (*not knowing in the least what he means*)

BYRNE. Yes, the—er—the Baltic.

ELAINE. Oh! Oh, yes, that boat. Yes, I missed that boat. Yes.

BYRNE. So I see.

DICK. (R. c. BOB left of DICK) You missed your boat?

ELAINE. Yes, I missed my boat. (*to BYRNE*)

The fact is, Mr. Byrne, I missed it on purpose.

BYRNE. Ah!

ELAINE. You'll be glad to hear that mother is better.

BYRNE. (*sardonically*) That's nice.

ELAINE. Yes, I got a cablegram late last night. She's much better. Isn't that fine?

BYRNE. Great. I was a good deal worried about mother.

BOB. Say, Dick, what are they talking about?

DICK. Can't you hear? They're talking about mother. Shut up.

ELAINE. Mr. Byrne, I know what you've come for.

BYRNE. (*abandoning the ironic tone and getting savage*) Yes, young woman, you do. I've come for that check, and I'm going to get it.

DICK. Oh, that's it.

BYRNE. Yes, that's it.

DICK. He's come for that check, Bob.

BOB. (*ironically*) That makes it all perfectly clear. (*crosses to L. RICHARD goes U. C.*)

BYRNE. And let me tell you something else; here I sit until I get it. (*BYRNE sits R. ELAINE goes to BYRNE*)

ELAINE. Why, Mr. Byrne— (*DICK goes back of desk*)

BYRNE. There's no talking me out of the house this time.

ELAINE. I hope you don't think I deceived you.

BYRNE. Oh, you'd never do anything like that. Oh, no.

ELAINE. Certainly not.

BYRNE. Look here. You said you'd see that Mr. Howard mailed me that check last night so that I would get it the first thing this morning. Didn't you?

ELAINE. Yes.

BYRNE. Well, I didn't get it.

ELAINE. (*suddenly turning on RICHARD*) See here, Dick! Why didn't you mail that check to Mr. Byrne?

DICK. You didn't tell me to mail it.

ELAINE. (*to BYRNE*) There, you see. I didn't tell him to mail it.

BYRNE. Huh!

ELAINE. Mr. Byrne, I don't like that huh.

BYRNE. Oh, don't you.

ELAINE. No, I don't.

BYRNE. Huh!

ELAINE. Didn't I tell you that I'd see that Mr. Howard mailed you that check as soon as I had finished my business with him?

DICK. (*crossing to ELAINE. BOB L. of DICK*) Look here, what business?

ELAINE. (*to DICK*) None of yours. (*to BYRNE*) Didn't I say that?

BYRNE. Well, yes, I believe you did.

ELAINE. Well, you see, I didn't finish my business with him.

BYRNE. (*rises*) What!

ELAINE. No.

BYRNE. Do you mean to say that you weren't able to make him— (*ELAINE leaps on him, covering his mouth with her hand. She lets out a little yell*)

DICK. See here, Elaine, I'd like to know what you're talking about.

BOB. So would I, for that matter.

ELAINE. (*to BYRNE*) No, I wasn't able to make him.

BYRNE. (*crosses L., followed by DICK and ELAINE. BOB stays R.*) I don't believe it. You'd be able to make the devil himself—

DICK. (*interposing to protect her*) See here,

Mr. Byrne, you're questioning this lady's word. That's an insult.

ELAINE. Not at all, Dick, it's a compliment.

DICK. What!

BYRNE. See here, Mr. Howard, how about my check?

DICK. Do you mean to say that a little thing like a check for \$2,000 will get rid of you?

BYRNE. I certainly do.

DICK. Well, great Scott! (*dashes for the desk, pulls a check-book out of drawer and begins writing.*

BYRNE sits L. after pulling chair in front of table.

ELAINE picks up papers from floor in front of desk, goes R. and sits on sofa)

BOB. (*going to DICK, aside to him*) Dick, are you going to give that man a check for \$2,000?

DICK. I am.

BOB. (*goes L., puts chair R. of BYRNE and sits, begins speaking in his most professional manner*)

Mr. Byrne, I'd like to submit a very attractive proposition to you.

BYRNE. (*grumbling*) Huh!

BOB. May I ask, are you insured?

BYRNE. Insured!

BOB. Are the little ones at home provided for?

BYRNE. Huh?

BOB. Now, one of our fifteen-year life and endowment policies is generally conceded to be the most effective method—

BYRNE. Oh, my God! (*he shakes BOB off and goes to ELAINE. She rises*) Look here, Miss Foster, about that affair last night—you can't make me believe that you really tried to make him—er—ah—

ELAINE. Er—ah—indeed.

BYRNE. Not after what you did to me. (*getting angry at the recollection of the manner in which she*

*had duped him*) Why, when I got out in the street and got thinking it all over—

DICK. (*gets up and opens door. Comes down to* BYRNE, *shoving check into his hand*) That's right, you get out in the street and think it all over. There's your check. It's dated three days-ahead, as I told you.

BYRNE. And there'll be funds to meet it?

DICK. Now don't make me go all over that again. Anyhow, it's the only chance you've got.

BYRNE. (*hesitating*) Well, I suppose it is; still—

DICK. (*in great exasperation*) Say, if you'll only get out I'd be almost willing to kiss you.

BYRNE. (*business*) Good night. (*BYRNE exits. ELAINE sits in chair R. DICK crosses to BOB*)

DICK. It cost \$2,000 to get rid of him; how much will you go for?

BOB. All I want is a kind word.

DICK. Then, angel of my dreams, get out.

ELAINE. (*to BOB*) Apple of my eye, go away.

(*DICK dumps him out of chair*)

BOB. I'm an angel and an apple.

DICK. You are. (*BOB goes toward door. ELAINE and RICHARD go back of desk and begin looking over manuscript. BOB comes back into room*)

BOB. Well, somebody's crazy.

DICK. Will you go or shall I throw you out?

BOB. You can say what you like, but if you think I'm going through another twelve hours such as—

DICK. You're quite right, Bob, quite right. I beg your pardon. I didn't think. I give you my word, you shall have no cause for worry until I see you again.

BOB. You mean it?

DICK. I do. (*offers him his hand*)

BOB. (*taking his hand*) Then that's all right. (*goes R. U., then stops, turns and comes back*) Dick—can I do anything for you?

DICK. Yes. You can shut the door as you go out. (*BOB goes out*)

ELAINE. Where's that last page?

DICK. There it is.

ELAINE. (*taking it from him*) Oh, yes. (*reading*) It's a quarter of ten. At five minutes to ten I'll come back.

DICK. Now, will you tell me how you got rid of Byrne?

ELAINE. I've got an idea about that. Suppose you let me write it.

DICK. What for?

ELAINE. Well, I don't think I could tell you.

DICK. Why not?

ELAINE. Well—I'd have to think it all out carefully and I might just as well write my thoughts down. Besides, we can save a lot of time that way, because you can go on writing the second act, this act, the one we're in now.

DICK. Do you mean that your getting rid of Byrne is to be the end of the first act?

ELAINE. Yes.

DICK. No, that won't do. We've got to get a punch for the end of the act. We've got to get a good curtain.

ELAINE. You're right—so we have. (*a pause while she thinks*) I've got it.

DICK. What?

ELAINE. (*crosses to DICK*) Don't you remember when we were sitting here at your desk and I said to you, "Act 1, the curtain rises on a dark black stage?" Well, where I said the curtain rises, that's where the curtain falls. Do you get it?

DICK. That's a corker. I'll make a note of that.  
(*pause while he does so*)

ELAINE. There. Now that brings us right up to—

DICK. Hold on. There's another thing. Don't you think it's about time we put some comedy into this first act?

ELAINE. Comedy? (*shakes her head dubiously*)

DICK. You know it's fairly gloomy. People have enough troubles in real life without going to the theatre to see more trouble.

ELAINE. Don't you worry about that! Just wait till I write how I got rid of Byrne.

DICK. Was that funny?

ELAINE. Funny? Oh, I think there'll be a few laughs in it. The fact is, it's almost too funny to be true. Now, while I'm writing that, you can go on with the second act, this act. Let it begin where you were sitting here at your desk writing on the play and the maid brought in your breakfast. Don't forget the Belasco breakfast.

DICK. Yes, yes, I see; then you, mother and Elsie.

ELAINE. Yes, and Bob. You can make something of Bob, can't you?

DICK. Oh, I've written Bob into the play already. You see, I had to tell him my story in the first act, and then he had to take Elsie to the dance, and then in this act—well, we might make him sort of a comedy relief—yes—although he was half expecting to find me dead.

ELAINE. Splendid! .

DICK. Eh!

ELAINE. I mean for the play.

DICK. Oh, yes.

ELAINE. Then there's my friend Byrne. You could do something with Byrne, couldn't you?

DICK. I could do a lot with Byrne.

ELAINE. Well, while I'm writing my comedy scene with Byrne, you can go on with this act. Bring it right down to the present moment. Do you see?

DICK. Yes, I see perfectly; but then—where do we go from there?

ELAINE. Don't you worry about that; something will turn up. *(she starts for the door; as she does so, it opens and MR. HOWARD comes in, pale, shaken and anxious; all three stand for a moment at a loss)*

DICK. *(the first to pull himself together)* Miss Foster, this is my father.

ELAINE. *(giving MR. HOWARD her hand)* How do you do, Mr. Howard?

MR. HOWARD. *(feebly)* Foster, Miss Foster.

DICK. Yes, she's on a visit to Elsie.

MR. HOWARD. *(gently and very courteously)* Ah, yes, yes, I see. You must excuse me, Miss Foster, but the fact is—I've not been well; otherwise I should have known of your coming. I'm sorry.

ELAINE. I quite understand, sir; I hope you're feeling better.

MR. HOWARD. *(hopelessly)* Thank you—thank you, my dear young lady; yes, yes, I'm better. *(walks down stage slowly in front of desk. DICK shows ELAINE out and closes door after her. Goes hastily to his father)*

DICK. Dad, I'm afraid you ought not to be doing this.

MR. HOWARD. *(goes back of desk)* Why not?

DICK. Why, you ought to be in bed. You ought not to be running about like this.

MR. HOWARD. Dear lad, what does it matter where a derelict like me may drift?



DICK. Now, Dad, I won't have you saying such things. I think we've got a chance to pull out.

MR. HOWARD. I just felt—like—like seeing you, because you're the only one who knows.

DICK. Didn't you hear what I said? I think we've got a chance to pull out.

MR. HOWARD. (*smiling helplessly*) Ah, do you indeed?

DICK. Yes, I do. (*turns and looks at door where ELAINE has just gone out*)

MR. HOWARD. (*his mind reverting to ELAINE*) What a beautiful girl.

DICK. (*R. of desk*) Miss Foster?

MR. HOWARD. (*sits back of desk*) So gay and so young; it must be wonderful to be young; and to think she doesn't know how wonderful it is. You're young, Dick, but I'm afraid you'll never be gay again.

DICK. Ah, now Dad.

MR. HOWARD. Yes, yes, I've attended to that. I've done for you—for you and all of us. Oh, my God. (*his arms fall on desk—he buries his head in his arms*)

DICK. (*coming to him and trying to soothe him*) Now, Dad, I won't have it, I tell you. I won't have it.

MR. HOWARD. But it's true, it's true, it's true. I've brought you all to the dust.

DICK. (*turning away*) I won't speak to you, I won't look at you, I won't listen to you while you talk like that. I can't stand it. (*turns his back on his father, walks back of desk down L., puts his hands over his ears and then goes up to window L.*)

MR. HOWARD. It doesn't matter whether I speak or keep silence, whether you listen or not. Stopping your ears won't do any good— (*his eyes fall on the drawer from which DICK took the check book and*

*which he has left open; as he goes on speaking, it is clear that he sees the revolver and is planning to get it. Takes same from drawer unseen by DICK and covers it with his hands)* I've had enough of it. I haven't slept for days, I haven't closed my eyes, and it seems like years. There's something that keeps pounding, pounding—pounding in my head day and night, day and night. My brain's burning up. (DICK turns to him, warned by the sound of his voice) Burning up, I tell you, and I can't stand it any longer, I can't—I can't. (he raises the revolver to his head. DICK turns and sees him just in time. There is a violent brief struggle)

DICK. Dad, dad, for God's sake—

MR. HOWARD. Let me go, leave me alone. (then the revolver explodes harmlessly in the air. DICK wrenches it away from the old man. It falls to the floor. Voices are heard off stage)

DICK. For God's sake, Dad, pull yourself together.

MR. HOWARD. Oh, why didn't you leave me alone? Why didn't you—

DICK. Dad, for pity's sake, brace up; the whole house will be about us in a minute. (he shakes his father) Do you hear? You don't want them to know, do you?

MR. HOWARD. (almost weeping) No, no, no. Don't let them know.

DICK. Here, quick, do as I tell you. Quick, here, get behind these curtains. (drags the old man to curtains at left and hides him behind them) Now stand there. Don't move till I get rid of them. For God's sake, don't move. (he hurries back to his desk, picks up the pistol just as ELAINE rushes through door)

ELAINE. Dick, Dick, what's the matter?

DICK. It's all right; a narrow thing, though.

ELAINE. Not you?

DICK. No. Dad; hush. (*he points to curtains.*)

BOB, MRS. HOWARD and ELSIE come rushing in, white-faced and breathless, closely followed by MARY, the maid. They all surround DICK)

MRS. HOWARD. Dick, Dick, my boy.

ELSIE. What is it, what is it?

BOB. What on earth. . . . .

DICK. (*calmly*) It's all right, it's all right. I was just a little careless.

MRS. HOWARD. Careless!

ELSIE. Careless; well, what do you—

DICK. It has something to do with the story.

MRS. HOWARD. Story!

DICK. Yes, there's something in it about shooting; and I took out my revolver to see how the fellow would hold it, and accidentally the thing went off. I'm sorry.

MRS. HOWARD. (*sits in chair R. ELSIE beside her. BOB back of sofa*) Well, I never.

ELSIE. Tell you one thing, you scared me nearly to death.

MRS. HOWARD. (*hysterically*) Dick, Dick, my boy, you might have been killed.

BOB. Look here, Dick—

DICK. Now for heaven's sake, Bob, dry up.

MRS. HOWARD. Oh, my boy—

DICK. Sis, please; here, take mother down stairs. Bob, take this thing away (*giving gun to BOB*) and keep them down stairs, please, please. (*he hurries them all out.* MRS. HOWARD, ELSIE and BOB go out. To ELAINE:) Elaine, please. It's all right, I'll explain later. Come back in ten minutes. Keep them down stairs. I've got to get dad back to his room. Please, please. (ELAINE goes out. DICK closes the door hastily behind her and leans heavily against it in a state bordering upon collapse. MR. HOWARD

*throws back the curtains and is seen for an instant. All lights go out. Curtain falls)*

(THE CURTAIN REMAINS LOWERED for a period of ten seconds to indicate the lapse of five hours. When it rises, DICK and ELAINE are discovered sitting behind desk C., under electrolier, each of them reading a stack of manuscript. ELAINE is reading his second act as far as it has gone. DICK is reading her part of the first act. RICHARD, tapping the manuscript:)

DICK. Look here. Do you mean to say that this is just what happened after I left you with Byrne last night?

ELAINE. Yes, as nearly as I can remember it.

DICK. And you really told him that you—you were trying to make me—er—ah—

ELAINE. Make you propose to me? Yes, that's what I told him.

DICK. And all that stuff about mother being sick in London.

ELAINE. Yes, all that, too.

DICK. Well, no wonder he was sore. Upon my word, I never heard of anything like it.

ELAINE. Well, I had to get rid of the brute somehow, so I said the first thing that came into my mind.

DICK. I know, but—

ELAINE. Well. I got rid of him, didn't I?

DICK. Bless you, yes.

ELAINE. Well, what more do you want?

DICK. Nothing whatever. (*he takes up manuscript to read on further*) There's no need to read the rest of this. It's just the scene between us two up to the point where you said, "The curtain rises on a dark black stage;" then that's the end of Act 1.

ELAINE. Yes, and Act 2 is all right as far as you've gone.

DICK. Yes. Right up to the point where the pistol went off and you all came rushing in. By George, that was a narrow thing. (*he rises and goes R.*) Turns me sick to think of it. Now, what next? Right there I stop; and our play's a long way from done, so far as I can see.

ELAINE. I was just going to speak about that. There's just one thing this play lacks and that it's got to have.

DICK. What's that?

ELAINE. It's what they call heart interest.

DICK. Oh, you mean it hasn't any love story?

ELAINE. It's got to have one, Dick. No use trying to sell it without one.

RICHARD. (*coming toward her*) That's so. Well, this hero and heroine have got to fall in love with each other.

ELAINE. Precisely. (*they look at each other with the first sign of embarrassment they have shown.*

DICK *sits.* *They look away from each other*) Handsome hero and beautiful heroine, thrown together in the midst of the hero's trials and tribulations, just as we have been; in the desperate process of trying to find a way out, just as we are trying now, must gradually come to a realization that—that—

DICK. That they love each other.

ELAINE. Yes, because don't you see that makes their success so much more necessary? It was hard enough in the first place for you, but now— (*she hesitates*)

DICK. Now that I'm in love with you—

ELAINE. That is, supposing you were in love with me.

DICK. Yes, yes, of course, that's what I mean.

ELAINE. And I with you, it would be—it would be—

DICK. Yes.

ELAINE. (*echoing unmistakably his genuine feeling*) Yes, that's what it would be. (*pause. Then she speaks in a more business-like tone*) So now, so long as this play is a record of fact, so far as we've gone, suppose we pretend that the rest of it is true, too.

DICK. Yes, yes, but—

ELAINE. Don't you see, you and I are actually the principal figures in our story. You the handsome hero, and I, in a manner of speaking, the beautiful heroine.

DICK. After all, that doesn't matter, because all heroes are handsome.

ELAINE. Yes, and all heroines beautiful.

DICK. Yes, and intelligent.

ELAINE. Of course; that's of no importance.

DICK. Oh, but it is; it's everything in our play. To me—I mean to the hero. But for you—but for her— (*throws up his hands in a frantic gesture and rises*) Oh! I'm getting all mixed up. I can't tell any more where fact leaves off and fancy begins. I keep telling myself that last night I hadn't even seen you—that five hours ago my father tried to kill himself in this very room—that if you hadn't come they would at this moment be preparing for my funeral, and now I'm putting it all in a play and yet it isn't a play. Is it true or isn't it? I can't tell, I can't tell. (*crosses R. and sinks into chair with head in his hand*)

ELAINE. (*coming to him and putting one hand on his head*) Come, come, Dick, you must pull yourself together. We've some work to do and we've not much time to do it.

DICK. (*pulling himself together*) I'm sorry—I'm an ass.

ELAINE. Well, never mind about that; are you quite all right?

DICK. (*rising*) Yes.

ELAINE. All right then, now for the heart interest.

DICK. Yes.

ELAINE. I mean the love scene.

DICK. All right.

ELAINE. Suppose we act it out. It'll sound much more convincing. (DICK *nods*) Good. Now let's go back to where you have just finished reading my part of the first act and I've finished reading your part of the second act. Is that clear? (*during this speech both walk arm in arm to c., then back to R.*)

DICK. Yes, quite.

ELAINE. (*sits on corner of desk*) All right then. Begin.

DICK. (*at table R.*) Begin!

ELAINE. Yes. Lead up to the subject of your suddenly realized regard for me.

DICK. (*with conviction, seeing her plan*) By Jove, you're wonderful.

ELAINE. Yes, that'll do for a beginning.

DICK. But I mean it.

ELAINE. And I'm talking about the play. Now say it again and I'll go on from there.

DICK. All right. (*the wind taken out of his sails, he says it in a perfunctory way*) By Jove, you're wonderful.

ELAINE. You must say it as if you mean it. It will put me in the mood.

DICK. By Jove, you *are* wonderful.

ELAINE. (*goes c.*) Nonsense, Dick, don't be absurd.

RICHARD. (*she says it so naturally that he is*

*again puzzled and drops out of his loverlike attitude)*  
Say, are you acting now or not?

ELAINE. Of course I am.

DICK. It didn't seem possible, you said it so naturally.

ELAINE. My dear Dick, we shall never get on at this rate. Will you try and forget everything but the play? We are trying to act a love scene; we need one desperately. Now, you and I are merely characters, have you got that?

DICK. Yes, I think so.

ELAINE. (*sits on R. corner of desk again*) Well, try to remember it. Now we'll begin again. Go on— By Jove, you're wonderful.

DICK. (*seats himself for another start*) Well, by Jove, you're wonderful.

ELAINE. (*rises*) Nonsense, Dick, don't be absurd.

DICK. (*goes to her. Now throwing himself into the scene earnestly*) But you are, and you know it, you're too intelligent not to know it.

ELAINE. At any rate, I don't mind your thinking so.

DICK. It wouldn't prevent it if you did. You know that, too, don't you?

ELAINE. (*softly*) You know, Dick, we really haven't time for this sort of thing.

DICK. Haven't we?

ELAINE. Have we?

DICK. It may be the only time we'll ever have. Have you thought of that?

ELAINE. (*goes L.*) Yes—no—no—I haven't, and I won't think of it. It's too terrible. Besides we must get on with our work. (*she crosses to C.*)

DICK. (*coming close to her*) Elaine, I've got to tell you—

ELAINE. No, no, I—



DICK. Don't be afraid, it can't do you any harm; but I—I can't go on any longer—like this.

ELAINE. Like this?

DICK. I can't seem to think any more about what we're trying to do; my heart is so full that my brain won't do its work.

ELAINE. (*turning from him*) Please.

DICK. My heart's so full of you. Three days ago I hadn't even heard your name. It's not twenty-four hours since I first saw you coming through that door; and now like a flame that leaps from blackness you've flashed into all that I've ever read or dreamed that's beautiful, all that's ever fired my brain or warmed my heart, all my life, my soul,—my dear.

ELAINE. Oh, Dick!

DICK. What I'm saying doesn't seem quite possible, does it? It's the sort of thing that simply doesn't happen; and yet it's true. It's the truest thing in all my life.

ELAINE. Dick, please.

DICK. It isn't fair of me to speak like this, standing as I do under a provisional sentence of death.

ELAINE. Oh!

DICK. But I can't help it. Loving you is the finest thing I've ever done in all my life, and I just can't bear the thought that you should never know. You see, it's a sort of bequest. I want to leave you the finest thing I have; do you mind?

ELAINE. Do you mean it, Dick?

DICK. (*solemnly*) God knows I do.

ELAINE. (*with an entire change of manner, very matter of fact*) Well, I think we're doing very well so far.

DICK. (*staggered*) Doing well?

ELAINE. I mean for the play. (*she makes it*

*clear she's not quite sure whether he is in earnest or not and is going to take no chances)*

DICK. *(turning away in despair)* The play. God! *(sits in chair R.)*

ELAINE. *(crossing to him)* Oh, that's good, Dick, that's fine, you just keep to that pose. You see, I don't quite know whether you are sincere or just acting, but it's very effective.

DICK. *(hopelessly)* Do you think so?

ELAINE. Yes; so then I go on—let's go back a moment. Dick, do you mean it?

DICK. *(with an effort. Repeating his former answer)* God knows I do.

ELAINE. Oh, Dick, I've wondered if you cared.

DICK. Didn't you know that I did?

ELAINE. Sometimes I've hoped you did and then I've hoped you didn't; because if you did care and things should go wrong it would make it so much harder for you to bear; and now you do care and it's too late to stop you.

DICK. Yes, it's too late, but you needn't be sorry.

ELAINE. Sorry? Oh, my dear. Last night as I lay awake and watched the first faint gray creep into my room, it seemed as if I had never seen the dawn before. I went to my window and looked out at the brightening sky, and presently tears came into my eyes, and suddenly I knew; and then like a flood of glory the sun and my love rose together. *(she is now close to him. He looks at her uncertainly a moment, starts to embrace her, then checks himself)*

DICK. Excuse me, I think I had better write some of this down. *(goes to desk and is about to write)*

ELAINE. Dick. *(he stops)* I mean it.

DICK. Elaine.

ELAINE. God knows I do.

DICK. (*his face brightening, he takes a sudden step toward her*) Elaine.

ELAINE. Yes, yes.

DICK. Elaine. (*he takes her in his arms, but without kissing her*)

ELAINE. (*presently disengaging herself ruefully*) Now you see we've got our heart interest.

DICK. Elaine. (*ELAINE goes up c. to phone. DICK crosses in front of desk to L.*) You don't mean— You can't mean—

ELAINE. Hello— Central, give me 3373 Bryant, New York—no, no, 3373.

DICK. Elaine, see here—

ELAINE. Hsh—hsh, not now, please. Are you ready to start?

DICK. Start! Where for?

ELAINE. For New York.

DICK. New York!

ELAINE. Certainly, to see Mr. Gilmore. I telephoned him at noon making a provisional appointment for five o'clock.

DICK. What for?

ELAINE. To read him the play.

DICK. But it isn't done.

ELAINE. Hello, oh, yes—I want to speak with Mr. Gilmore—this is Miss Foster—yes, Miss Foster. (*to RICHARD*) Hurry up now and get the manuscript together, we haven't much time. (*he stares at her, speechless*) Please do as I ask. (*she stamps her foot at him. Bewildered, he goes to the desk and puts the manuscript together. In phone:*) Oh, hello, Mr. Gilmore? This is Miss Foster. We'll be at your office at five o'clock—what? Oh, yes, five o'clock. Good-bye. (*she hangs up receiver*) Come on, Dick, the car is at the door. I had the chauffeur bring it around.

DICK. But Elaine—

ELAINE. We can just about make it.

DICK. But I tell you the play isn't done.

ELAINE. It's near enough. We can read him what's written and act the love scene.

DICK. Yes, but even then it's not done.

ELAINE. Not done?

DICK. No, we haven't any last act. What happens next? I don't know.

ELAINE. I do.

DICK. You do? Well, heavens and earth!

ELAINE. Now don't stand there gibbering. Don't I tell you it's all right?

DICK. But I want to know what happens next.

ELAINE. Then come along and I'll tell you in the car. (*seizes her coat and jams her hat on*)

DICK. In the car!

ELAINE. (*in great exasperation*) For the last time— (*holding the door open*) Are you coming or not?

DICK. (*now in a state of wild bewilderment*) All right! I'm just like Byrne, "I'll do it, damned if I know why I'll do it, but I'll do it." (*takes up his hat and coat*)

ELAINE. Then come on. (*they start to go out.*  
BOB *enters*)

BOB. Say, where are you off to now?

DICK. We're going to sell the play. (*he and ELAINE hurry out*)

BOB. (*in wild bewilderment*) Sell the play! What the devil—here, wait for me—hold on—wait— (*rushes out after them*)

CURTAIN

## ACT III

SCENE:—Immediately following Act II. GILMORE'S office, in Times Square. A typical office of a theatrical manager, with many framed photographs of actors and actresses on the walls. Door at R. 3 E. Flat top business desk at L. C. with swivel chair R. of it. Piano upright C. stacked full of manuscripts. Two chairs L. of desk. Leather divan at right. Windows at L. 3 E. and rear L. Push button desk. Clock up C. points to 5:45 o'clock.

AT RISE:—GILMORE, DICK and ELAINE are discovered. GILMORE is seated at his desk. DICK and ELAINE are seated L. of desk. DICK is just finishing the reading of the play. To be read before curtain rises:

DICK. "Mrs. Howard, Elsie and Bob go out. Dick to Elaine: It's all right, I'll explain later. Come back in ten minutes. (*curtain rises*) Keep them down stairs, I've got to get Dad back to his room. Elaine goes out, Dick closes the door hastily behind them and leans heavily against it in a state bordering upon collapse as the curtain falls."

GILMORE. I see. The old chap is still behind the curtain.

DICK. Yes.

GILMORE. Is that the end of your second act?

DICK. No, there's another scene to come.

GILMORE. Another set, eh?

DICK. No, the same set. You see, Mr. Gilmore, my idea is that during this act the lights will be lowered for a period of ten seconds to indicate the lapse of five hours. (*he lays down manuscript*)

GILMORE. Oh, that's it. (*presses button—office boy enters*) Mr. Bingham. (*boy exits*) Now what is supposed to transpire during this interval of five hours?

DICK. Well, Dick is supposed to get his father back to his own room; and then he and Elaine go on writing the play.

GILMORE. Oh, I see. (*BINGHAM enters*)

GILMORE. Pardon me, just a moment. (*crosses to BINGHAM*) Say, Steve, I have an appointment for this hour, haven't I?

BINGHAM. Yes, Governor, he's out there now.

GILMORE. Ask him to step around to the Lambs Club and come back in half an hour. This chap's got a play that's different from anything I ever heard before.

BINGHAM. As good as that, Governor?

GILMORE. Yes, better than that. I haven't heard all of it, but as far as it's gone it's a corker.

BINGHAM. All right, Governor, I'll hold him off.  
(*he exits*)

GILMORE. (*goes to water tank and gets a glass of water R.*) Your throat must be dry, Mr. Howard, after all that reading. Won't you have a glass of water?

DICK. No, thanks.

ELAINE. I will, please.

GILMORE. Pardon me, Miss Foster. (*Crosses to desk with glass and sits. ELAINE hands water to DICK, he drinks it*) Now, then, let me hear the rest of your play.

DICK. Well, from this point on, Mr. Gilmore, we haven't altogether—well—that's all there is.

GILMORE. What!

ELAINE. Yes, we haven't written the rest.

GILMORE. I don't get you.

ELAINE. We're going to tell you the rest of it.

GILMORE. Oh, I see; well, that's all right; but see here, there's one thing that's wrong—all wrong.

DICK. What's that?

GILMORE. You haven't any heart interest.

ELAINE. (*rises. Triumphantly to DICK*) I told you.

DICK. (*to GILMORE*) That's right, that's what she said.

GILMORE. Well, that won't do.

ELAINE. That's exactly what I said, Mr. Gilmore, so—so we put some in. (*she goes c.*)

GILMORE. Well, I haven't seen it. Is it any good?

ELAINE. Well, I, eh, er—I think you might think it isn't so bad.

GILMORE. (*to DICK*) Well, do you like it?

DICK. Well—I—I guess it's all right.

GILMORE. Where does this love scene come in?

ELAINE. That's the rest of Act 2.

GILMORE. But you haven't written it.

ELAINE. No—we sort of acted it out.

GILMORE. Acted it out?

ELAINE. Yes.

GILMORE. Well, what happens in this love scene; do the young people get married?

DICK. Married? Well—I don't exactly know.

GILMORE. Don't know?

DICK. No—I—ah—

ELAINE. What he means, Mr. Gilmore, is this. I said to him just what you said, "there isn't any heart interest," and he agreed there had to be some, so we just went on—invented speeches along that line.

GILMORE. But, good Lord, I want to know whether the young people are going to get married;

not that I care a hang, but the audience will want to know.

ELAINE. (*doubtfully*) Ye—es, I suppose they will.

GILMORE. Well, then, are they going to get married?

DICK. Well, I—I don't know.

GILMORE. Don't know. (*to ELAINE*) Well, do you know?

ELAINE. I—I'm not quite sure.

GILMORE. Well, great Scott!

ELAINE. What I mean, Mr. Gilmore, is that we acted it out—so as to leave each of us—I mean each of them—in doubt.

GILMORE. In doubt?

ELAINE. (*with a brief glance at DICK*) Well, yes, some doubt.

GILMORE. Well, what's the end of your second act? Give me the curtain.

ELAINE. Yes, Dick, give him the curtain. (*she goes to chair back of desk and sits*)

DICK. The curtain shows them rushing off to town to sell the play to the manager.

GILMORE. The manager?

ELAINE. Yes, to you.

GILMORE. To me! That's the end of your second act—where you rush off to sell the play to me?

ELAINE. Yes.

GILMORE. Hmm. Well, there's some suspense in that curtain.

DICK. There is for me.

GILMORE. All right then, now what happens in your last act?

DICK. We—we don't know yet.

GILMORE. Why don't you know?

DICK. Because this is the last act.

GILMORE. (*bewildered*) This!



DICK. Yes, this—this office—right here. (*with a wave of his hand that includes the whole room*)

GILMORE. Here?

ELAINE. Yes. You're in it, too.

GILMORE. Me?

ELAINE. Of course you are.

GILMORE. Well, I'll be dam—

ELAINE. And you want to be very careful what you say; because it's all going to be in the play.

GILMORE. You mean you're going to put me in your play?

DICK. We have to. We can't finish the play till we know whether you'll buy it or not.

GILMORE. Well, good Lord. How can I say whether I'll buy it until you finish it?

ELAINE. Don't you see? The solution of this play depends on you! We don't know yet whether it's going to be a comedy or a tragedy.

GILMORE. Well, if you don't know, who does?

DICK. You do.

GILMORE. I do!

DICK. Yes.

GILMORE. Say, look here, are you trying to make me think that I'm helping to write this play?

DICK. Yes. That's exactly what you're doing. If you buy it, it will be a comedy, and if you don't, it will be a tragedy; because, if you remember, the hero originally planned to take his own life so that—

GILMORE. Yes, yes, I know all that.

DICK. Well, it follows that if he doesn't succeed in selling this play at once he must carry out his original intention.

GILMORE. Kill himself.

DICK. Yes.

GILMORE. Hmm. I don't care much for that ending.

DICK. I don't care much for it myself.

GILMORE. Well, that's easy; you're the author; give it a happy ending.

DICK. I will, if you'll buy it.

GILMORE. If I buy this play, you'll put a happy ending to it?

DICK. If you buy this play, that will put a happy ending to it.

GILMORE. (*rises and goes c.*) By George, this is a big idea. It certainly is unusual. It's all right. I've been looking for a novelty and here it comes walking right into my office. Say, if you can work this up into a good last act, this play ought to be a cinch.

DICK. I think so.

ELAINE. So do I.

GILMORE. All right, I'll take the play. (*he sits at desk and writes a check. ELAINE and DICK rise and come down L. of desk very much elated. Kiss business*)

ELAINE. But, Mr. Gilmore, you don't quite—

DICK. Mr. Gilmore, we forgot to tell you—  
(*ELAINE and DICK speak last two lines together*)

GILMORE. (*writing*) Just a minute, just a minute. I wrote a check once for three thousand dollars instead of three hundred just because somebody was talking to me; and the son-of-a-gun cashed it, too. (*rises and hands check to DICK*) There you are. Come in tomorrow morning and sign a contract. (*GILMORE crosses R. to water cooler, draws glass of water and is about to drink. DICK and ELAINE look at check*)

ELAINE. (*reading check*) Hudson Trust Company, \$500. (*shakes her head, gives check to DICK*)

DICK. (*crossing to GILMORE*) I'm sorry, Mr. Gilmore, but it isn't enough.

GILMORE. Not enough. Five hundred dollars not enough?

DICK. No, sir.

GILMORE. Well, what do you want?

DICK. (*looks at ELAINE*) Twenty-two thousand dollars.

GILMORE. Twenty-two thousand dollars!

ELAINE. In advance, please. (*GILMORE looks at them for an instant in amazement, then he goes to door R., throws it open and calls*)

GILMORE. Steve, Steve, come here, will you? (*BINGHAM enters. To DICK and ELAINE*) My general stage manager, Mr. Bingham. (*GILMORE sits R. on divan. BINGHAM shakes hands with DICK*) Steve, tell this young man what are the usual terms for a play by an unknown author.

BINGHAM. Oh, about five hundred dollars down—and say—five per cent of the gross receipts.

GILMORE. This young man wants to sell me a play—'tish'n't all written either—and what do you suppose he wants for it? . . . . Twenty-two thousand dollars.

BINGHAM. My God! (*turns on his heel and goes out*)

GILMORE. You see, he thinks you're crazy. I guess you are. (*sits*)

DICK. No, Mr. Gilmore, five hundred dollars is no good to me—nor a thousand—nor five—nor ten thousand. (*DICK hands GILMORE the check*)

GILMORE. Wait a minute; see here, my boy, I like your play; I want to produce it. (*rises and goes to DICK*) But your proposition is unreasonable. It's absurd. Why, in all my experience as a manager— (*GILMORE turns away from DICK*)

DICK. Wait a minute, let me tell you what I mean. This play is absolutely true.

GILMORE. What?

DICK. I'm the hero.

ELAINE. And I'm the heroine.

GILMORE. What! You—you mean that— (*sits*)

ELAINE. Just what we say, Mr. Gilmore.

DICK. We've used real names in the play, my own, Miss Foster's, my father's, my mother's—of course, they'd have to be changed. We didn't have time to do that.

GILMORE. (*rises*) Hold on—hold on, wait till I get this straight. You say that you've used real names in this play.

DICK. Yes.

GILMORE. But I never heard of a bank called the Clarendon Trust.

DICK. No. That's the one name I did change. If I tell you the real name, I must ask you to treat it as strictly confidential.

GILMORE. Why, certainly.

DICK. McKinley National.

GILMORE. You mean to say that your father's really president of the McKinley National Bank?

DICK. He is. (*GILMORE hurries to table up c. and produces bank directory*) And has been for fifteen years.

ELAINE. And Byrne is paying teller there, too.

GILMORE. (*reading from book*) McKinley National, President James H. Howard. Wheu! Heavens above, I've got forty thousand dollars in that bank; and the first thing tomorrow morning I'll draw it out. (*puts directory back on table*)

DICK. Then you believe us.

GILMORE. (*coming down to DICK c.*) Look here, do you really and truly mean that if I don't pay you \$22,000 for this play you—you—

DICK. I shall fulfill my father's obligation in the only way I can.

GILMORE. My God, it's preposterous.

DICK. Perhaps, but it's true.

GILMORE. How do I know it's true? How do I know it's not a frame-up? Give me some proof—about the bank, I mean.

DICK. If I could, I would, but how can I? I can't have you stirring up the bank; that would arouse suspicion and everything would come out. No, Mr. Gilmore, I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to take my word; if you can't do that, then there's nothing to be said but good day.

GILMORE. And go and finish yourself off; is that what you mean?

DICK. Well, at least that would convince you, wouldn't it?

GILMORE. Upon my word, I do believe you're crazy.

ELAINE. How about me?

GILMORE. (to DICK) See here, how did you describe that man Byrne?

DICK. Byrne? I don't remember describing him at all.

GILMORE. But you know him, don't you.

DICK. Of course, I know him.

GILMORE. He's a tall, thin, handsome chap, isn't he?

ELAINE. No, no.

DICK. No, nothing like that. He's a fat, pudgy man with sort of a pumpkin face.

ELAINE. Yes, and pop eyes.

GILMORE. Well, that's on the level anyhow. He's paid me thousands of dollars. (goes to phone) Get me the McKinley National.

DICK. (at c.) Hold on, I won't have you stirring up father's bank. I won't have it.

GILMORE. Oh, it's all right.

DICK. But I tell you it'll ruin everything. I won't have it; and you gave me your word.

GILMORE. Don't be a fool; I'm not going to ruin anything. And I'm not going to break my word. (*phone bell rings*) Hello, this the McKinley National?

DICK. For God's sake, be careful.

GILMORE. This is Mr. Gilmore, yes, Charles Gilmore. I want to speak to Mr. Howard. . . . Oh, he's home ill, eh?

DICK. You see?

ELAINE. There.

GILMORE. When do you expect him back? . . . Oh, all right . . . then let me speak to Mr. Byrne . . . Mr. Byrne, paying teller . . . Yes, all right.

ELAINE. Now, if you say anything to that brute about me—

GILMORE. Sh—sh— It's all right, I tell you. Hello. That you, Byrne? Yes, this is Mr. Gilmore. Say, Byrne, do you know a young woman named Foster?

ELAINE. Here now—

GILMORE. Miss Elaine Foster. . . . Oh, you do. . . . What's that she told you? (*he chuckles at BYRNE'S reply, gives a look at ELAINE and DICK and laughs aloud*) What's that? . . . say, Byrne, here—here—hold on—there's a lady present—hello, Byrne—hello. (*hangs up receiver*) He's rung off.

ELAINE. (*sits L. of desk*) I judge he seemed to know me.

GILMORE. I judge he did. Want to hear what he said?

ELAINE. No, thanks.

GILMORE. So all that farce comedy stuff between you and Byrne in the first act of your play really happened.

ELAINE. Of course, it did.

GILMORE. I wouldn't have believed it in a million years.

ELAINE. So now, Mr. Gilmore, you've got independent evidence.

DICK. And you know my father is sick at home just as I've told you in the play: and if you want evidence of my ability to raise \$25,000 by killing myself, there it is. *(he takes policy from his pocket and gives it to GILMORE)*

GILMORE. *(looking at it and reading)* Home Guarantee Insurance Company, \$25,000, eh?

DICK. As stated in Act 1.

GILMORE. But all you're asking me is \$22,000. *(ironically)* Why do I get the \$3,000 rebate?

ELAINE. We're letting you in at cost.

GILMORE. Oh!

DICK. Yes, \$20,000 for the bank and \$2,000 for Byrne.

GILMORE. Then if you should carry out your original plan, after all debts have been paid, there would still be \$3,000 left from this policy. What would be done with that? *(gives policy back to DICK)*

DICK. I don't know. I suppose part of it would be used for my funeral expenses.

GILMORE. *(rises, goes L., then crosses to DICK)* There you go again, always dragging up that dismal finish of yours. Now, see here, this is blackmail, that's what it is.

DICK. Blackmail? *(ELAINE gets up and goes L. C.)*

GILMORE.— Yes, blackmail. You come to me and say that if I don't buy your play you'll go and kill yourself; and what's more I'm beginning to believe it.

DICK. *(at R. C.)* That's not blackmail.

GILMORE. *(crosses R.)* Well, it amounts to the same thing. Why the deuce did you have to tell me

it was your own story? It isn't fair. (*goes to water cooler and gets drink*)

DICK. I don't care whether it's fair or not. When a man's fighting for his life he doesn't stop to think about trifles like fairness; and if there's anything I can do to sell you this play that I haven't done already I'll do it, if I can think of it, if it amounts to—to burglary.

ELAINE. Me, too.

GILMORE. (*almost weeping with vexation, coming down R. C.*) But great goodness, why pick me out, why make me the goat?

ELAINE. That was my idea.

GILMORE. Oh, many thanks.

ELAINE. Oh, Mr. Gilmore, you're the only theatrical manager I know, and from the little I saw of you on the boat, I thought you were a very decent sort.

GILMORE. Now, now, that's worse yet.

ELAINE. What is?

GILMORE. That's blarney; that won't work.

ELAINE. Mr. Gilmore, you don't seem to understand how desperate we are.

GILMORE. Well, I can't help it, it isn't my business. (*sits on divan R.*)

DICK. I realize that, Mr. Gilmore, and I'm sorry to put you in this position, but—

GILMORE. (*going to DICK*) See here, my boy, wouldn't \$5,000 help you out? I might go as high as that.

DICK. Thank you, Mr. Gilmore, but nothing less than \$22,000 would be of any use.

GILMORE. Well, it's too bad. I like you and I like your play and I wouldn't like to let it get away from me, but \$22,000—well, it isn't business and that's all there is to it. (*sits on divan R.*)



DICK. Very well then, I guess there's no more to be said. Come, Elaine.

ELAINE. (*crossing to GILMORE. Pleadingly*) Oh, Mr. Gilmore.

GILMORE. (*rises*) No, it is not business. (*goes up stage, then crosses L. DICK goes L., gets hat and manuscript and goes to ELAINE*)

ELAINE. (*protesting*) No.

DICK. Yes. (*a pause, she gives up, they start to go to door R. U.*)

GILMORE. (*at L.*) See here, you can't leave me like this! (*they both turn and come back*)

ELAINE. Why not?

GILMORE. Why hang it all, if it turns out that everything is just as you said and you should really do what the chap in your play plans to do, and I look at the paper in the morning, and there, staring me in the face in glaring headlines, "Son of bank president electrocutes himself, family prostrated, mother and sister's lives despaired of," why, can't you see, that for the rest of my life, I'm going to feel like a confounded murderer?

ELAINE. Of course, I should be very sorry for that.

DICK. So should I, if it were not for the fact that at that moment I shall be incapable of any emotion whatever.

ELAINE. (*breaking suddenly, DICK takes her in his arms*) Oh, Dick, Dick.

DICK. I'm sorry, I didn't think.

GILMORE. (*angrily to DICK*) Well, it's time you did think.

ELAINE. I can't bear it.

GILMORE. I can't bear it either. It's just a little too much, that's what it is. People have feelings, even theatrical managers. (*sits R. of desk*)

DICK. I'm very sorry indeed, but as the whole business hangs on the finish I don't quite see—

ELAINE. Oh, he's right, Mr. Gilmore, he's quite right. I'm sorry to have made such a scene, but I think I've stood about all I can.

DICK. So you have; and it's all my fault.

GILMORE. Of course, it's your fault.

DICK. (*crosses angrily to GILMORE*) Well, I said it first. You needn't rub it in. (*to ELAINE*) Come, Elaine, are you ready?

ELAINE. (*tearfully*) Yes, I'm all right now, really I am. (*crosses to GILMORE*) I hope you'll forgive me for being so silly, Mr. Gilmore, but the fact is— (*begins to cry again*)

GILMORE. (*rises, taking her hand comfortingly*) Oh, that's all right, my dear young lady, that's all right, it's perfectly natural you should— (*suddenly drops her hand*) See here, if I thought you were acting, I'd—

ELAINE. (*through her tears*) Well?

GILMORE. I'd give you a five-year contract at \$400 a week.

ELAINE. Mr. Gilmore, successful plays make more than \$22,000 for the author, don't they?

GILMORE. Yes, they do.

DICK. They make a great deal more than \$22,000, don't they?

GILMORE. Yes, some of them do.

DICK. All right then, suppose we were to finish the second act just as we've described it.

GILMORE. That wouldn't finish the play.

DICK. No, but this act would.

GILMORE. This act?

ELAINE. Yes, this one; the one we're in now.

GILMORE. Well, I've got to hand it to you; it's a big idea.

DICK. You bet it's a big idea. Now, suppose we

wrote for the last act everything that's been said since we came into this room.

ELAINE. And suppose you take the play and give us a check for \$22,000.

GILMORE. (*with a grimace of pain*) Help! (*goes L. behind desk and stops C.*)

ELAINE. And suppose we were to finish the play that way.

GILMORE. Help! Oh, have a heart!

DICK. Don't you think you'd like it?

GILMORE. Like it? With me giving you \$22,000?

ELAINE. Now, Mr. Gilmore, do try to put aside all personal consideration; wouldn't you like it as a play?

GILMORE. Yes, I would.

DICK and ELAINE. There you are!

GILMORE. If I could forget it was so blame true.

DICK. Wouldn't you think it had a chance?

GILMORE. Yes, I should.

ELAINE. A good chance?

GILMORE. Yes, a good chance.

ELAINE. Well, then, there you are.

GILMORE. Yes, I know, but \$22,000; and there you are.

ELAINE. You know what the money's for. By the way, I'm beginning to like this act.

GILMORE. I'm so pleased.

ELAINE. At college I was taught that the essence of drama is struggle, and we're certainly having a struggle to get \$22,000 out of you.

GILMORE. Struggle! it's a contortion. (*sits R. of desk. ELAINE goes back of desk to L.*)

DICK. Now, Mr. Gilmore. (*knock is heard off stage*)

GILMORE. Come in. (*the office boy enters*)

JIM. There's a man outside.

GILMORE. Didn't I tell you not to bother me?

JIM. Yes, sir, but this man says—

GILMORE. I don't care what he says, get out.

(JIM exits. ELAINE and DICK come pleadingly toward GILMORE. He ignores them.)

DICK. Well, Mr. Gilmore, I'm afraid there isn't anything more to—

(Outside a commotion. a noise like a young riot. Blows, shouts, furniture turned over, etc. The door bursts open and JIM and BOB CASWELL fall into the room fighting)

BOB. Here, somebody take this young devil off me or I'll kill him, I will now.

(GILMORE and DICK separate the combatants, both much the worse for wear)

GILMORE. Jim, look here—

DICK. Bob, what on earth—

GILMORE. (to CASWELL) Look here, what the devil do you mean? Get a policeman, Jim.

DICK. It's all right.

JIM. All right! What do you mean all right?

DICK. This is my friend, Mr. Caswell; he knows all about it. We had to tell him on the way down. He's been waiting outside to hear the result and I suppose he got so anxious he couldn't stand it.

GILMORE. Well, is that any reason why he should assault my office boy?

JIM. (at R. C., threateningly) Yes, you—

BOB. (at L. C.) Now, go away or I'll murder you.

JIM. You will, hey?

GILMORE. (interposing) Get out. Jim.

JIM. (going) All right, but wait till I get him outside, I'll show him— (goes out)

GILMORE. Caswell, was that it?

DICK. (at R. C.) Yes.

GILMORE. (*at c.*) Where have I heard that name before?

ELAINE. (*L. of desk*) In the play, Mr. Gilmore.

BOB. (*at L. c.*) I'm the life insurance agent.

GILMORE. Oh, the life insurance agent! Well, by George! This is uncanny. It's amazing. It's unbelievable. (*to Bob*) Say, did you know you're in this play?

BOB. Sure, didn't I tell you I was the life insurance agent?

GILMORE. Well, I'm in it, too. I'm the manager.

BOB. (*shakes hands with GILMORE*) How do you do?

GILMORE. Well, as a character in the play you're a good comedy part, but as a life insurance agent you're a fine piece of goods, now, aren't you?

BOB. What's the matter with me?

GILMORE. Plotting to defraud the company that pays you your salary.

BOB. Is that so; well, what would you do?

GILMORE. Me?

BOB. Yes. Suppose you were dead broke and your best friend told you he was going to kill himself in order to save his family from disgrace and ruin. What would you do?

GILMORE. Do? I'd stop him.

BOB. You would. How?

GILMORE. I'd dig up the money.

BOB. How?

GILMORE. Borrow it.

BOB. All right, lend it to me. (*GILMORE throws up his hands, goes up L., throws open windows and walks rapidly up and down. ELAINE sits L. of desk. DICK takes BOB by shoulders, forces him down into a divan R.*)

DICK. Now, Bob, don't be an ass. This isn't your affair.

BOB. Isn't it?

DICK. No, it isn't.

BOB. It is, though; d'ye think I want to cheat my own company?

DICK. Now, for heaven's sake— (GILMORE crosses to ELAINE)

GILMORE. Say, you want to stick that line in your play. That's the biggest laugh you've got. Lend it to me. (GILMORE goes R. U. DICK comes C.)

DICK. Well, Mr. Gilmore.

GILMORE. (coming down to DICK) Do you fully realize what you're asking me?

DICK. Yes, I think so.

GILMORE. If I buy this play at your price, do you realize that before the curtain goes up it stands me in about \$40,000?

BOB. A mere drop in the bucket.

GILMORE. (sits on sofa R.) Bucket! You don't care how you spend my money.

BOB. (a pause, after sizing GILMORE up a moment) Mr. Gilmore, I'd like to submit a very attractive proposition to you.

GILMORE. Yes?

BOB. (in his most professional manner) May I ask, are you insured?

GILMORE. What?

BOB. Are the little ones at home provided for?

GILMORE. Little ones?

BOB. Now, one of our fifteen-year life and endowment policies— (GILMORE leaps to his feet in disgust)

GILMORE. Oh, what have I ever done! . . . . .  
(GILMORE walks around back of divan excitedly, comes R. C. DICK beckons BOB to come to him. He does so)

GILMORE. (to BOB) Say, Mr. Life Insurance Agent, you're writing yourself a good part in this play, aren't you? "Are the little ones at home provided for?" (*sits on divan*)

DICK. (*crossing to GILMORE*) Mr. Gilmore, we're pretty near the end of our rope; there's not much more we can say, but there is just one thing more. Suppose you take this play and suppose it should fail; do you think from this sample of my work that I might some time write a success?

GILMORE. Why, yes, I think it quite possible.

DICK. Then I'll make you this offer. You take this play; if it fails, I'll go on writing plays for you until you get your money back. (*he speaks with the greatest possible earnestness*) I'll go on writing plays for you all my life if necessary. I'll do anything you say till the money's paid. I'll bind myself over to you by any sort of contract you may choose. I'll run your errands, I'll write your letters, I'll be your valet, I'll be your slave, I'll scrub your floors, I'll black your blessed boots, yes, and call it joy to do it, so long as there's breath in my body or flesh on my bones. So help me God. (*GILMORE gives DICK a long keen look. ELAINE rises and goes slowly to DICK, stands behind him. GILMORE walks slowly to desk. Sits and takes check book out of drawer. Picks up pen and starts to write, then turns*)

GILMORE. What's the date?

ELAINE. (*shooting the words out like a gatling gun*) Twenty-first.

GILMORE. Thanks. (*he begins to write. After he gets half way through the task of writing the check, he pauses and speaks*) Now, there's another thing.

ELAINE. Oh, please, don't stop. (*in an agonized voice, clasping her hands quickly in appeal. GIL-*

MORE gives her a look, and then resumes writing check. BOB comes close to desk and looks at check GILMORE is writing. He glances up and scowls at him. BOB backs away a step. GILMORE finishes writing check, tears it out and leans back in chair)

GILMORE. Miss Foster—what do you honestly think about it yourself?

ELAINE. Think about what?

GILMORE. About this play. Do you really think the public will like it?

ELAINE. Oh, they must; the darlings, they must. (she takes a step or two toward the audience and says, with a little cry) Oh, you do, you do, don't you?

GILMORE. (smiling) Why, Mr. Howard, I believe she actually sees herself playing this part. (she retires in sudden confusion) And perhaps we might do worse than to engage her.

DICK. Mr. Gilmore, why don't you play this part?

GILMORE. What part?

DICK. This part—the manager—the part you're playing now?

GILMORE. Well, I would be the type—wouldn't I? (he rises and comes to DICK and is about to hand him the check, but stops) Twenty-two thousand dollars! By George, if I really do this thing I'll have Charley Dillingham, Klaw & Erlanger and all those other Broadway managers looking like a lot of pikers. At that, I think Billy Brady would give more than this for this play just to get a crack at my part. I've got to start the publicity campaign of my life. I believe I'll have a play contest and award the prize to this play.

ELAINE. That's a big idea.

GILMORE. There's my title—"The Big Idea." How'd that look on the three sheets? Charles Gilmore presents "The Big Idea."



ELAINE. Mr. Gilmore, why not tell the public the truth about it?

GILMORE. What?

ELAINE. Tell them it's a true story.

GILMORE. You mean—

ELAINE. If you could only make them believe it, they'd never let you lose by it; just because you've been so kind to two young people who needed it so very, very much. (*she puts her arm around DICK's*)

GILMORE. Say—that's a big idea, too—and the night this play is produced I'm going out before the curtain and tell the audience it's a true story. (*a pause*) Well, I'm in for it now. (*kisses the check and gives it to ELAINE*)

ELAINE. (*reading it*) Hudson Trust Company, pay to the order of Richard Howard \$22,000. Oh, Dick, Dick, there's your happy ending!

DICK. (*taking GILMORE's hand*) Mr. Gilmore. I don't know how to thank you. I don't know what to say or what to do—I—

GILMORE. (*interrupting him*) Oh, never mind that.

DICK. But I want to—

GILMORE. See here, young man, do you really want to do something for me?

DICK. Good heavens. I'd do anything—anything.

GILMORE. Then never tell a soul about that check. If it ever got out there'd be a mob of grafters around this office that would look like a double-header at the Polo grounds.

DICK. But it's sure to get out when this play is produced.

GILMORE. Oh, well, perhaps they won't believe it's a true story.

(*Enter STEVE BINGHAM*)

BINGHAM. Well, Governor—

GILMORE. What is it, Steve?

BINGHAM. Have you forgotten that appointment?

GILMORE. (*recollecting*) Good heavens!

BINGHAM. Well, he's back; and he says if you want to hear his play he's got to read it now.

GILMORE. (*in comic despair*) Hear his play—Tell him I'm broke—going out of business—never mean to buy another play.

BINGHAM. (*utterly astounded*) Have you lost your mind? Have you forgotten who he is?

GILMORE. I wouldn't care if he were Bernard Shaw. I've just been cleaned out by the hold-up twins.

BINGHAM. Hold-up twins?

GILMORE. Yes. I've just given Jesse James and his pal a check for \$22,000 . . .

BINGHAM. Yes, you have. Ha, ha! (*going to door*) Some comedian, Governor. (*exits*)

GILMORE. What do you think he'll say when he hears I've really done it?

DICK. Mr. Gilmore, may I use your phone for a moment. I want to tell dad.

GILMORE. Sure. (*DICK crosses to desk and picks up phone*)

DICK. Hello. Give me 56 R Elmdale. Yes, please—56 R— Yes, thank you. You'll call me? Gee! Won't he be glad!

GILMORE. Now, while you're waiting for that number, how about that heart interest? (*DICK crosses to ELAINE and whispers in her ear*)

ELAINE. Do you mean it, Dick?

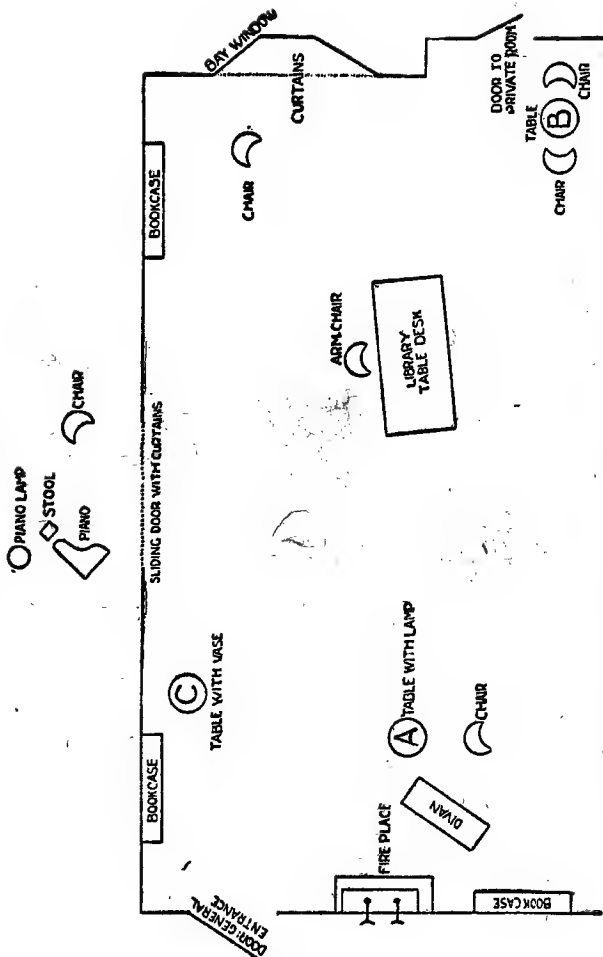
DICK. God knows I do. (*she goes into his arms.*)

GILMORE. Fine! That's the way to end it; why, the audience will love it. You'll get three curtain calls on that scene as sure as you're alive!

CURTAIN

# THE BIG IDEA

ACTS - 1611



N.B. THERE IS A BIG ELECTRIC LAMP ON TABLE A WITH EXPOSED WIRES. A VASE OF FLOWERS IS ON TABLE C. TABLE B IS USED IN ACT II FOR THE BREAKFAST SCENE. OVER THE LARGE LIBRARY TABLE HANGS A HUGE ELECTROLIER. IN ACT I THE DIVAN FACES L. IN ACT II IT FACES R. TOWARD THE FIREPLACE

# THE BIG IDEA

ACT III

TIMES SQUARE BACKING

